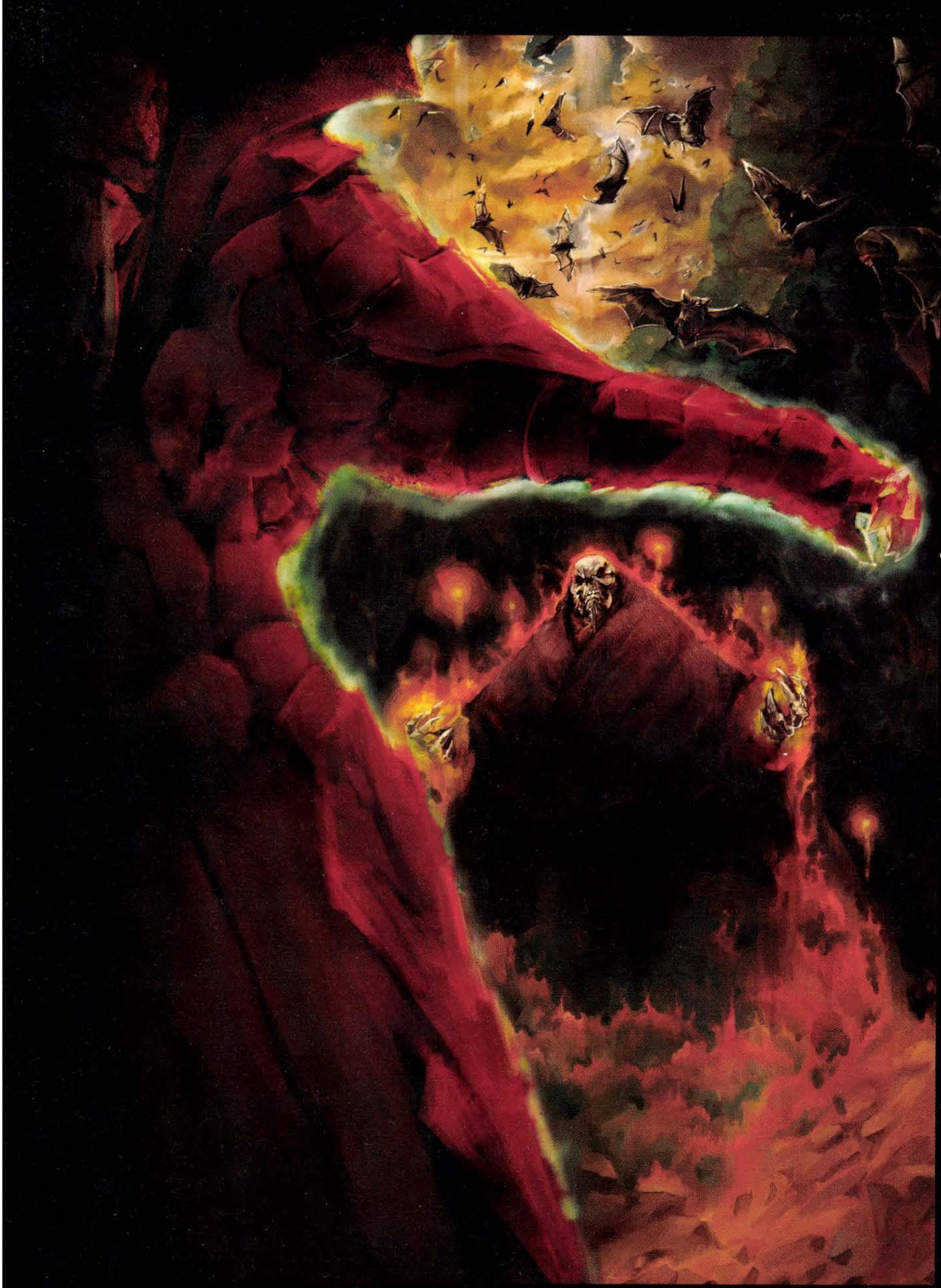

OVERLORD 3 The bloody valkyrie Kugane Maruyama

illustration by so-bin

オーバーロード 3 鮮血の戦乙女

丸山くがね

1章 捕食者の群れ

Predator's Gang

Part 1

"What kind of food is this!" A hysterical, high-pitched cry, followed by the sound of cutlery clattering against the plates, rang throughout the surroundings. Several people in the restaurant turned their gaze toward the girl that was throwing a tantrum. The girl's appearance was beautiful, to the point where the word 'beautiful' would be inadequate to describe her. Her beauty was even enough to rival the most beautiful in the kingdom, also known as the "golden princess". Even her anger only added to her charm.

Not only that, even though she was so noisy, her every movement was filled with grace and brimmed with elegance. Surely, she must be the daughter of a noble from another country. Not only that, but both a highborn and wealthy noble. She impatiently lifted her long luscious hair and stared dissatisfied at the dishes in front of her. The whole table was almost filled to the brink with plates full of food.

Inside the basket were steaming, heavenly soft, and white breads fresh from the oven. On the plate, there were chunks of lightly grilled meat that was so juicy and tender it made one's mouth water. The meats was complemented with aromatic, grilled, sweet buttered corn and creamy, scrumptious mashed potato as side dishes. The combination greatly excited one's sense of hunger and appetite. There was also a tasty salad made with grilled marinated tenderloin on top of vegetables so fresh it was as they were right from the garden. The tantalizing and aromatic fragrance of tangerine could also be smelled from the salad dressing.

These were the best and most extravagant dishes made by the restaurant inside the most luxurious inn of the walled city E-Rantel, the "Shining Golden Pavilion"… Their ingredients were guaranteed to be at their freshest through the use of the spell 'Preservation'. Naturally, all their cooks were first-class elite chefs. These were cuisines only the nobles and the wealthy may savor. However, the girl was clearly not impressed by these artful and superb dishes.

"This doesn't taste good at all!" Not only were the people surprised hearing her complaints, but they also wondered what kind of heavenly food this beautiful girl must be having normally. The inappropriate grumbling she muttered to herself caused everyone to show a stunned expression. In the meantime, the old butler behind her had kept his posture and expression unchanged. Even after she turned around and stared harshly at him, he still kept firm. It was as if he had only one expression.

"I cannot continue to stay at this ramshackle town, prepare to leave immediately!"

"But ojou-sama, it is already dusk—"

"Shut up! Do as I say, is that clear!" Faced with her childish tantrum, the butler finally changed his posture and lowered his head: "Understood, ojou-sama. I shall make preparations for us to leave immediately."

“Humph! If you get it then hurry and make haste, Sebas!” The girl tossed her fork aside with a clang. Having nothing left to vent on, she stood up dissatisfied and stomped out of the restaurant. After the commotion, a dignified voice broke through the dissipating tension in the restaurant: “I give my sincerest apologies to everyone, for causing such a commotion.”

The butler took the chair which had nearly been knocked over when the girl stood up and returned it to its original position. Having apologized, he courteously bowed his head towards the patrons inside the restaurant. The guests graciously accepted the old butler’s perfect apology, and many even looked at him in sympathy.

“Manager.”

“Yes.” A man, who had been waiting nearby, quietly moved to the butler’s side. “I sincerely apologize for the disturbance and even if it isn’t much of a compensation, allow me to cover the dinner expenses of everyone present.” Quite a few patrons couldn’t refrain from showing a delighted expression after hearing his offer, since eating a meal in the restaurant of the city’s most luxurious inn was definitely not cheap.

If the butler was willing to pay for their meals, it should be more than enough to forgive the commotion brought about by the behavior of his mistress. On the other hand, the manager of the “Shining Golden Pavilion” kept his face firm and unfazed and courteously bowed in response to the butler’s suggestion. His unshaken expression showed that this wasn’t the first time a scene like this had happened.

Sebas directed his eyes toward a corner of the restaurant, settling his gaze onto a poor and deprived-looking man in the middle of wolfing down his food. Noticing the butler’s line of sight, the man hurriedly stood up and walked towards Sebas. In comparison to the other guests, this man really stood out because his utter lack of ‘manners’ and ‘class’ made it impossible for him to blend into his surroundings without giving off the feeling of being totally out of place. Though his clothes were just as good compared to the patrons here, his clothes gave the impression of wearing him and he was looking so much like a clown dressed in an elegant outfit, that he was a somewhat amusing sight.

“Master Sebas.”

“What is it, Zach-san?” The other guests frowned when they heard the pretentious tone of the man called Zach. Hearing that kind of servile greeting coming out of his mouth, they wouldn’t have been surprised if he was rubbing his hands together. However, Sebas’ expression did not change in the slightest. “As a hired hand, I know I am hardly in a position to make any suggestions here, but is it possible for us to reconsider leaving immediately?”

“Are you implying you have difficulties in handling the carriage and horses at night?”

“…That’s part of the reason. And… I have some things to take care of in this city… I need a bit of time.”

Zach was constantly scratching his head. Even though his hair looked clean enough, the way he kept scratching his head made it look like dandruff would be flying around any second. Seeing this, some of the guests frowned even further but in the end it wasn’t clear whether Zach noticed

or not since he just scratched his head even harder. “Ojou-sama will probably not accept this suggestion. No, according to her temperament, she will not change her decision.” Sebas determined with a firm and adamant expression before adding in a curt voice: “So, we have no other choice.”

“But…” Zach’s eyes darted around, as if trying to find an excuse, but he wasn’t able to come up with anything and a frown appeared on his face.

“Of course, we still have some time before we leave. I need some time to load all of ojou-sama’s luggage onto the carriage. You may do as you wish in the meantime and take care of whatever you need.” Sebas didn’t miss the treacherous look in the scrubby man’s eyes, as if he was still trying to find another excuse to delay the group even further. But he pretended not to realize Zach’s foul intentions and kept his face indifferent. He also wanted to hide the fact that Zach had fallen for his trap.

“So, when do we leave?”

“About that, it should be around two or three hours? If we leave any later than that the streets will be completely engulfed in darkness, so three hours would be the limit.” The man’s eyes once again showed that detestable calculating look, and Sebas again tried his best pretending not to realize. Zach then licked his lips a of couple times before speaking: “Heheh, then we shouldn’t have any problems.”

“Very well, could you please immediately start making preparations for us to leave?”

Sebas looked at Zach’s retreating back. He then waved his hand as if to disperse an unpleasant air around him, feeling as if something filthy had stuck onto him. Without showing any visible expression on his face, Sebas suppressed his urge to sigh. To be honest, Sebas couldn’t find it in himself to like such a base and vulgar character like Zach at all. Demiurge, Shalltear and some of the others might be able to treat someone like him like a toy for their personal amusement, but Sebas didn’t even want to get close to that kind of person.

There were some common viewpoints within the Great Tomb of Nazarick: ‘Those who don’t belong to Nazarick are inferior’ and ‘Apart from a few exceptions, humans and demi-humans should be annihilated for being an inferior race’. Sebas on the other hand shared the same opinion as his creator, ‘Those who cannot save the weak shouldn’t claim to be strong’, but after having met such a despicable human like Zach, he started to think that maybe the shared viewpoint of Nazarick wasn’t so wrong after all.

“Ahh, humans were supposed to be more splendid than this…” Sebas lifted his hand to stroke his well-trimmed beard in order to take his mind off the matter and pondered about on how to continue their current operation. *The operation is going quite smoothly, but perhaps I should still monitor him to make sure.* While Sebas was considering how to proceed with the direction of the operation, he noticed a man walking toward him.

“Having to leave at this hour must be rather difficult for you…” The man that spoke with Sebas was between forty and fifty years old, clean shaven and his black hair was streaked with many strands of white hair. Perhaps due to his old age and extravagant eating habits, there was a big

belly on his stomach. He was dressed tastefully, his clothes elegant enough for a man in a high position.

"If it isn't Bardo-san?" Sebas nodded slightly as to greet him, but the man hurriedly tries to stop such gesture: "Ah, no need to be so courteous." His name was Bardo Rofure and he was a well-known food merchant controlling a considerable amount of the food trade within this city.

Sebas wasn't sure why this man had come over to talk with him. This walled city held an important strategic importance for war. As someone controlling a considerable amount of the food trade, Bardo was one of the most influential merchants in the city. When an army numbers in the tens of thousands of people, the logistics involved with transporting provisions and rations takes quite a lot of time and effort.

The Kingdom's strategy was to march its army there with minimum supplies and provide the army's need in this city. Which meant this city wasn't quite like the other commercial, cities since merchants dealing with food or weapons held quite a large amount of influence and authority inside this town.

Someone with such authority within the walled city of E-Rantel shouldn't be talking to Sebas just because they both happened to eat at the same restaurant. He should have an ulterior motive for trying to converse with him. However, this was also one of Sebas' goals. "Sebas-san, that man is no good."

"Is that so?" While speaking with Bardo, Sebas changed his expression for the first time since the whole incident began. He revealed a courteous smile because he understood exactly who the merchant was speaking of.

"That guy is known as untrustworthy and dishonest, I cannot understand why Sebas-san is hiring a guy like him." Sebas quickly thought this over to find the best reply for this situation. He couldn't reveal the reason they had hired Zach to Bardo. If Sebas told him he hired Zach because he didn't knew of his character, his evaluation might be lowered and his judgment could be questioned. *Though we're certainly leaving this city soon, I should still avoid the possibility of Bardo lowering his evaluation of me. In the near future, there may be the possibility that we will have to use him.*

"Maybe you're right, but no one introduced himself as shamelessly as he did. Though his character might be flawed as a whole, ojou-sama quite appreciates his enthusiasm." Bardo showed a troubled bitter smile. His evaluation of her was probably lowered by another notch. It was for their goal that he had asked her to play this role, so it couldn't be helped. He felt quite bad that she had to play such a spoiled character. "I overstepped myself, I hope you can forgive my remark. Maybe it's better to hint and advise this to your lady?"

"Perhaps you're right. But considering the help and support milady's father had given me, I just cannot bring myself to…"

"Though loyalty is very important too…" Bardo muttered a sentence, but the subsequent words could not be heard clearly.

"Would you like for me to recommend you some trustworthy men?"

“No need to be so considerate, Bardo-san.” Though his tone was gentle, he firmly rejected of his proposal. Detecting the iron will under his statement, Bardo tried another approach. “Is that so? I still think it would be better if proper bodyguards were to follow along. The road to capital is far. Unlike the Baharuth Empire, the Kingdom of Re-Estize's roads aren't very safe. I could to help you find some trustworthy mercenaries.” Safety of the road is being maintained by the nobles of the area, and they charge a toll fee for people traveling their roads. It’s one of many rights of the nobles, but it’s only a means for them to collect revenue. Many parts of the roads weren’t maintained nor properly patrolled, with many gaps in security.

Therefore, it was common for travelers to be assaulted by bandits or mercenaries that have turned to banditry. In order to solve this problem, under the efforts of the “Golden Princess,” the soldiers under the king’s direct control started patrolling the roads. But due to their small numbers, there weren’t any notable differences. The number of the patrolling troops was also small due to the constant meddling of the nobles who were scared of their rights being infringed. Since it became like this, the country itself didn’t really have the power to maintain the order and security of the roads.

Merchants who needed to travel on the roads normally hired a team of adventurers or mercenaries to protect themselves. A powerful merchant like Bardo should know some elite and trustworthy mercenary groups, but Sebas still couldn’t accept his proposal. “Maybe you’re right again, but ojou-sama doesn’t like to be surrounded by many people. I wish to follow ojou-sama’s wish to the best of my abilities.”

“So it’s like that?” Bardo exaggeratedly furrowed his face and showed a troubled expression. It was the face of a helpless adult confronted with a child’s tantrum. “My sincere apologies, for us to be so inconsiderate towards your goodwill.”

“Please don’t say that. To be honest, I just wanted to sell you a favor. If it can’t be done, I at least want to improve our relationship.”

The daughter of an extremely wealthy merchant or noble from the Empire and her butler that was the setting under which Sebas stayed in this inn. Their act was intended to show their huge wealth and to let the others know of their presence. Gaining favors from people as wealthy as Sebas’ group should be in Bardo’s interest. Sebas smiled gently to the fish that had taken the bait: “Of course I will let ojou-sama’s father, my master, know of Bardo-san’s hospitality and kindness.”

Bardo momentarily showed a sudden glint deep in his eyes, but he recovered instantly. Normally, most people wouldn’t have been able to detect such a swift change, but Sebas saw it clearly. “Then, please excuse me. Ojou-sama is waiting, so I will take my leave now.” Waiting for the exact moment Bardo was about to speak, Sebas beat him to it. Bardo knew he had been seen through and after taking a peek at Sebas’ expression he sighed: “Whew, if it’s really like that then it cannot be helped, Sebas-san. The next time you’re in this city, please do come visit me. I’ll give all of you a warm welcome.”

“Of course, the next time we meet we’ll be in your care.”

Looking at Bardo’s retreating back, Sebas muttered: “Guess there are all kinds of people out there in this world.” Through Bardo’s words and mannerism Sebas could feel that not all were fueled by ulterior motives. Bardo did have a genuine worry for a young lady and her old butler. It was

because of people like him, who wished to help those in need, that Sebas couldn't bring himself to despise humans. Sebas joyously showed a heartfelt smile.

♦ ♦ ♦

After knocking a few times and excusing himself, Sebas bowed slightly before entering the room. "Please excuse my previous rude behavior, Sebas-sama." Sebas closed the door and was greeted by a deeply bowing girl. If the patrons inside the restaurant could see this scene, they would be bewildered and deeply surprised, because the bowing girl was none other than the hot-tempered girl throwing a tantrum earlier. Her expression was well composed, it was as if her hysteria back then had been just an act and her manner was befitting of greeting someone of a higher position.

The appearance and outfit were unchanged, but she seemed like a completely different person. Another intriguing difference was that one of her eyes was closed her left eye. She did not do so while inside the restaurant. "Please, there's no need for you to apologize. You were only doing your job." Sebas looked around the luxuriously furnished room.

Of course, if one were to compare this room to Nazarick's 9th level, the Royal Suite, this room would hold no charm at all. Of course, that wasn't a surprise since he simply picked the wrong object to compare it with. He set his eyes to the corner of the room and found that the luggage was already packed and gathered. They were able to leave immediately if they wished to do so.

Since they weren't prepared by Sebas, she must have done it all by herself after she left early. "You should've let me pack instead."

"What are you saying Sebas-sama, I cannot continue to trouble Sebas-sama with such a menial task." The girl straightened her body and shook her head. She is one of the battlemaids, Solution Epsilon (ε). "Is that so? But right now I am your butler, you know."

Sebas' well wrinkled face showed an expression like of a mischievous child. Solution noticed Sebas' amused expression, and changed her composed face for the first time to an embarrassed smile: "Indeed, Sebas-sama is my butler, but I am also under Sebas-sama as your subordinate."

"…I suppose that's true. In that case let me give you a command as your superior: You have done well so far, so let me do the rest. Please rest until it's time for us to leave."

"…Yes, thank you."

"Then, I will go meet with Shalltear-sama who should already be waiting impatiently in the carriage, and inform her on the time of departure."

Sebas easily picked up the largest luggage with a single hand, and asked her a question as if he suddenly thought of it: "By the way, is everything proceeding according to our predictions?"

"Yes, everything is proceeding just as we had expected." Solution lifted her hand and pressed it against her closed eye. "I suppose we're fortunate. So, what's happening currently?"

"Yes… He's currently meeting with a shabby looking man. Would you like to hear what they're saying?"

“No need, I am going to move the luggage onto the carriage. Let me hear of the summary later.”

“Understood.” Solution suddenly twisted her expression. The corners of her eyes drooped and the edge of her lips curled up. Though the expression was similar to a smile, it was twisted further than humanly possible. It was like taking a smiling face made of clay and twisting the features together.

“Sebas-sama, please allow me to change the topic.”

“What is it, Solution?”

“…When everything is over, would you allow me to take care of that man?” Sebas used his free hand to stroke his beard and briefly thought it over. “About that, as long as you have Shalltear-sama’s permission, you may do as you wish.” Solution’s brows furrowed slightly, a face filled with disappointment could clearly be seen. Sebas saw and tried to comfort her: “It should be fine; there shouldn’t be any problem with giving you only one guy.”

“Really? That’s wonderful! Please help me relay my wish to Shalltear-sama. If it is possible, I want to have that man.”

Solution showed a smile brimming with joy. That kind of cheerful sunny expression without a shred of gloom could charm any on looking person. Sebas felt pity and interest in the man who made Solution to show such an expression. He asked her: “So, what did that man say?”

“I think he said he couldn’t wait to enjoy me. It’s a rare chance, so I plan to enjoy him properly too.” Solution showed an even brighter smile. That smile contained a childlike innocence; like a kid looking forward to the next big event.

Part 2

A miserable life. Zach walked quickly, thinking about how miserable his life had been. Life in the Kingdom as a farmer couldn’t be called fortunate or easy. Though he labored very hard in the fields every day, most of the harvest was taken by the landlord. If the yield of a full harvest had a hundred shares, it was still bearable if only sixty shares were taken away. It was still possible to survive on forty shares, even if it meant a life of poverty. However, there would be a serious problem if eighty shares were collected. If one could barely make a living with forty shares, there was no doubt life would become hellish and unbearable with only twenty shares.

During one of the years with only twenty shares to live with, he returned home worn out after a hard day of farm work, only to discover that his little sister had disappeared without a trace. Zach was still young when it had happened. His adored little sister went missing, but his parents wouldn’t go looking for her. He didn’t know what was going on back then, but now he clearly knew the reason: She had been sold.

In this day and age, slave trade had finally been stopped due to the efforts of the “Golden Princess”, but slavery had been quite common within the Kingdom back then. For that reason, whenever he visited brothels and passed by prostitutes, he would subconsciously stare at their faces. Of course, he didn’t believe he could find his little sister like this. Even If he did find his little

sister this way, he wouldn't know what to say to her. Nonetheless, he just couldn't stop himself from looking.

Living in such a harsh and poor environment, one also had the heavy obligation to be drafted into the army. The Kingdom of Re-Estize periodically went to war with the Baharuth Empire, and often drafted soldiers from farming villages such as his. To lose an able worker for even a month was quite a big deal for a small village and it significantly affected the yield of a harvest.

However, there were also those who felt lucky to be drafted into the army. Since there were less people that needed to be fed, a family's food expenditure was reduced. For those who were drafted, they're provided with rations given by the Kingdom. For some, that was the first time they experienced how it feels like to be full.

Sadly, these were just about all the upsides… Even if you risked your life, without achieving a major accomplishment, receiving any kind of reward would be impossible. Some didn't even get rewarded for completing great achievements, only those who were truly blessed with luck could find success within the army. After the end of the war the soldiers went back their villages, but they only found despair because the village's harvest had lower than expected yield due to lack of workers.

This had happened to Zach after his first two drafts. But during his third draft, a way to change his fate occurred. The war that time was like the others, it ended with only a small scale battle. Luckily, Zach survived the battle. As he was about to head back to his village, he stopped. He looked at the weapon in his hand and an idea popped into his head… Perhaps it would be better to try another kind of life than to go back to that village.

But he was just a farmer and he barely received any training for war. He didn't have many choices for his new life. His body was mediocre and there was no way he could compare himself to those few that were born with innate talent. All he had learned in his life is to sow seeds and farm, and when to spread which seeds.

That was just about all he knew. Zach took initiative with his one and only one trump card, and that was to run away with the weapon issued to him by the Kingdom. The thought of troubling his parents never came into his mind because they had sold his little sister — even if they did it so the rest of the family could survive — and he no longer held any love for them.

He had no background and didn't know anyone, so how was he able to escape the army easily. Luckily, he met with some people who could help him with his escape, perhaps his luck wasn't that bad after all. It was a mercenary group that had helped him escape. Of course, to the mercenary group, Zach was only a farmer and wasn't much of a use to them. But they had lost many members due to the war, and wished to quickly return to their former size.

Because of this, the mercenary group easily let Zach join. But this wasn't really a legitimate mercenary group. During a war, they were mercenaries. During times of peace, they became bandits. It is no wonder what sort of life he led after that point. To have something is better than nothing. To take is better than to be taken from. Instead of crying, it is better to let the others cry.

He was living that kind of life. He felt no wrong, and had no regrets. Every time he heard the victims' begging and whimpers, he further confirmed on his beliefs to be so. Now he broke into a

run in the lower city. He runs in the world that's in even deeper shade of red than the current setting twilight.

He had been pushing himself ever since he had left the inn, so he's already breathless with beads of sweat on his forehead. He felt exhausted and wanted to rest, wondering if he should actually do so. But since he didn't have much time, he endured the fatigue and kept on running. As Zach was about to make a sharp turn at the corner of the street—

"So dangerous~" A complaint and a clattering of metal sounded as the figure quickly turned their body to avoid a collision. The near impact startled Zach, and he looked towards the shadow that had jumped back. In front of him was a woman with well-proportioned face. The black cape she was wearing was blending her with the shadows, but her bright purple eyes were looking at him with great curiosity. Due to his exhaustion, Zach had lost all of his patience and barked: "That's my line! That was dangerous! Keep your eyes in front of you!"

The woman didn't seem to be afraid of his threatening snarl and showed him a cold smile. That smile made Zach want to step back and he couldn't muster the courage to take out the knife hidden under his shirt. He was like a mouse being stared down by lion. The clattering sound of metals that he heard from the moment she jumped back, it's probably from her armor. An armor-wearing woman, perhaps she was an adventurer.

…Wrong target to pick a fight with. Zach's subconscious was sending out danger signals, and he realized the situation he is in. He wouldn't look down on this woman because of the naive thinking that females were of the weaker sex. Zach knew there was a really strong group of female only adventurers. He remembered this being casually mentioned by the strongest member of his mercenary group.

Although Zach was in the same group as that member, he was undoubtedly the weakest of them all. He was made the errand boy because he's weak. Drenched with sweat from all the running, Zach now regretted the threatening tone he took and his sweat slowly turned into another kind of sweat. As Zach's face was showing obvious fear, the woman's smile suddenly became less frightening: "Hmm~ whatever. I don't have much time either. But if I see you again, be prepared to feel some discomfort~"

The woman casually remarked and walked around him. Zach became interested in the direction this particular woman was heading, but it was just a part the lower town where no one was living. It was already this late, so why was a beauty like her heading toward the slums? Though he felt curious, he had more important matters to deal with. He started running again.

After a while, he reached another part of the lower city that was filled with many ramshackle houses. He briefly looked around to check if he had been followed. The sun was gradually sinking below the horizon, and the world was slowly shrouded in darkness. Zach tried to check a second time to see if anyone had been following him by hiding in a dark corner. He had repeatedly performed this action many times already, but he wanted to check one last time just to be safe.

Nodding in satisfaction Zach tried to catch his breath while knocking the door three times. Five seconds later, he knocked another four times. After giving the secret knock, a reaction could immediately be felt on the other side of the door, which was the sound of a wooden plate sliding

against the door. The wooden plate blocking the peephole slid to the side, and a man's eyes could be seen looking around, to confirm the identity of the intruder.

"Ah, it's you. Wait a moment." He didn't wait for Zach's response and blocked the peephole again. The sound of heavy lock being opened could be heard next and the door opened slightly. "Come in." The rooms gave off a slightly rotten odor, it was a world of difference to compare this to the hotel he had just been in.

Zach hoped his nose would get used to this smell soon, and quickly slid into the room. The door was closed and Zach saw that the room inside is both dark and small. This place was a dining hall with a built-in kitchen, but there was only one table. On the table stood lone candle illuminating the dim room slightly.

A filthy man who gave off the air of someone who made a living through violence and brutality pulled out a chair by the table and sat down. The chair creaked as if it was screaming. The man had a solid frame and a broad chest. Light scars could be seen on this man's face and arms. The chair looked as if it is about to collapse under his weight.

"So, Zach, what is it. Did something happen?"

"The situation changed… The prey is about to move."

"Ah… So they are going now." Zach nodded slightly. The man complained in low voice: "Why did they choose this hour… Can't they be more considerate of us." At the same time he lifted his hand and scratched his messy hair. "Is there no way to delay them a bit?"

"It's not so easy because it's a request by that girl."

The man had already heard many times about how the girl was like and exaggeratedly wrinkled his face. "That old geezer should use some of his brain and try persuading the girl to not leave at night. Traveling at night is scary and there might be bandits. Damn it, I can't stand this… Even idiots know that. Ah… How about sabotaging the wheels of the carriage to delay them until tomorrow?"

"I don't think I can… They're already moving the luggage onto the carriage, perhaps it would be better to just be done with this quickly?"

"Hmm, that's not wrong…" The man was looking up while thinking deeply. "So, around what time will they leave?"

"In about two hours."

"The timeframe is very tight. Hmm… What to do. If we only have two hours to prepare then we gotta contact the others quickly… Though it might be a bit difficult, but they're preys hard to come by."

The man counted his fingers as he thought about the amount time for the operation. Zach silently listened in on the plan and lowered his head to look at his hand. "Rich people like them get you riled up, don't they…" Zach recalled the pristine and perfect hand of hers. Those who worked on a farm would never have such beautiful hands. From handling the hoes and all the heavy farm

work they did, everyone's hands were both rough and dirty, down to their very nails. He knew this world wasn't fair. But…

Zach curled up the corner of his mouth, showed his teeth, and gave a lewd and lecherous smirk: "I'll have my turn to toy with her… right?"

"Only after I'm done with her. We also need to ask for a ransom, so don't be too rough and hurt her too badly." The man also showed a lecherous smile. Perhaps stimulated by his desire, he stood up.

"Alright, it's decided. Let me contact the leader."

"Got it."

"We'll send around ten guys to the ambush spot. You should go now, make sure they'll arrive at the spot in about four hours. If you're delayed somehow, we'll attack directly. Try to calm them down in order to make them drop their guard."

Part 3

A carriage was quickly speeding away from the walled city. Four strong horses were pulling a large carriage that was more than large enough to carry six passengers. The surrounding area was unexpectedly bright, illuminated by a large, bright moon that hung in the sky… Even so, it was still foolish to travel hastily in a night like this. Putting up lights, making camp and setting a watch detail would've been a wiser choice.

Saying the night wasn't a world controlled by humans wouldn't be enough. To put it more clearly, places where the light didn't shine didn't belong to humans. Countless animals, demi-humans and monsters lurked in the night; many with eyes that could pierce the dark and attack humans.

In a dangerous night like this, the passengers only felt a slight vibration as the carriage moved down the road. The trembling wasn't weak because of excellent suspension, it was due to the fact that the carriage was moving on stone paved roads. The construction of stone paved roads only began after a proposal from the "Golden Princess", but as of now, the only places that had paved roads were some of the territories under the King's direct jurisdiction, and the territory of one of the six grand nobles, Marquis Raevan.

This was due to the opposition of the aristocrats, who felt the ease of movement would make it easier for the Empire to invade. The cost of road maintenance stirred up a lot of commotion as well. Princess Renner's suggestion of raising funds from the merchants was hampered by the nobles who feared that their authority and revenue would be diminished. This resulted in the current state of affairs looking as if it had been chewed by a dog.

This area wasn't far from the city under the direct jurisdiction of the King, and as such, the maintenance was done quite well. However, it wasn't perfect. The carriage traveling on the road would still wobble occasionally, and the passengers would feel the vibration. Due to the shaking, the conversation inside the carriage ended as if they had just finished a topic.

In the carriage was Sebas, Solution besides him, Shalltear seated opposite them and Shalltear's two slave concubines, Vampire Brides, on either side of her. And of course, Zach was seated on the driver's seat, driving the carriage. After a momentary silence in the carriage, Sebas opened his mouth with a relaxed tone: “There is a certain matter I’ve always wanted to inquire about…”

“Hmm? Question for me? What is it?”

“You and Aura-sama seem to be on bad terms, is there any reason for that?”

“…Actually, I don't think our relationship is bad.”

Shalltear answered quietly, inspecting the nail on her pinky with a bored expression. The pearly white nail was about two centimeter in length. She held a file in her other hand, but the nail was already neatly trimmed and didn't require polishing. Satisfied, Shalltear tossed the file to the vampire seated beside her. After that, she attempted to extend her empty hands to the breasts of the vampires on both sides of her, but noting the expressions of the two people before her, Shalltear made an embarrassed face and withdrew her hands.

“It doesn't feel that way.” Sebas continued. Shalltear's face frowned as if she had eaten something bitter: “I… Me… Okay. It's because my creator Peroroncino-sama made my settings to be on bad terms with her, so I tease her a bit more. However, it's probably the same for her, maybe Bukubuku Chagama-sama made that kid's setting to be at odds with me.” Feeling disinterested, Shalltear waved her hand and met Sebas’ eyes for the first time.

“By the way, my creator Peroroncino-sama and that kid's creator, Bukubuku Chagama-sama are younger brother and older sister. In a way, we could also be considered sisters…”

“Siblings, so that's how it is!”

“In the past, when Peroroncino-sama and the other Supreme Beings — Luci★fer-sama and Nishiki Enrai-sama — came to my domain, they mentioned that.”

When she recalled how she accompanied the great beings making their rounds, Shalltear's eyes were full of adoration: “Peroroncino-sama once mentioned that Bukubuku Chagama-sama had a job called voice acting. She was very popular and provided her voice for 'H-Game', so whenever he bought a popular game he was looking forward to, the image of his sister's face came to mind, making him lose his drive.”

Although I have no idea what that was supposed to mean, added Shalltear. Sebas also tilted his head in confusion: “Voice acting… I recall that it is a job using your voice. They will even sing sometimes, so it should be similar to bards.” Hearing Sebas’ reply, Shalltear let out a chiming laugh and corrected him: “Wrong.”

“Wrong? What is it then?”

“I heard this from Bukubuku Chagama-sama herself, a voice actress is someone who bestows a soul to a work through the use of her voice. Which means voice acting is a profession that creates life.”

“Ohh! I get it now, I actually misunderstood it so badly. Thank you for enlightening me, Shalltear-sama.”

Characters such as Sebas that were created by the Supreme Beings were given knowledge the moment they were born. However, they only had that knowledge, without actually knowing what the real thing was like, so they would create some amusing misunderstandings, just like just now when they misunderstood the profession of one of their adored creators. Sebas felt embarrassed, and to avoid making the same mistake, he repeated the term, committing the meaning of voice acting to memory.

“Don't take it too hard. Oh right, Sebas, since we are journeying together, you don't need to be so polite.”

“Really, Shalltear-sama?”

“Don't address me as -sama… We are all servants of the Supreme Beings. Although the Supreme Beings bestowed us positions and set the hierarchy among us, we are fundamentally the same.” That was correct. Solution served Sebas because she was ordered to. She and Sebas were of the same rank after all.

“I understand, Shalltear. I will address you as such.”

“That is great. Speaking of which, isn't the relationship between you and Demiurge quite bad?” Sebas didn't say a word. Shalltear who saw such a reaction squinted her eye like a mischievous child and continued asking: “The Supreme Beings didn't order you to do that, so why did it turn out this way?”

“…Actually, I am not so sure myself. It's probably out of my nature, I just dislike him. However, it should be the same for him.”

“Hmmm, nobody makes me feel that way… But, maybe the feelings of the creators are embedded deeply in our heart.”

“That is very possible.”

Shalltear stared at Sebas who was nodding in agreement. Considering his position, Shalltear thought he might know and asked a question she had harbored for a long time: “Who is on the 8th floor? I know Victim is there, but who else is with him?” Sebas frowned at the sudden change in topic. To find out the true intention behind Shalltear bringing this up, he looked at Shalltear with a serious expression. Solution who was seated beside them changed her expression slightly, but the two who were conversing didn't notice as it was too minute.

“…Long ago, there were foolish people who opposed the Supreme Beings, attacking in huge numbers and breaking through the 7th floor. But the 9th floor of the Supreme Beings’ base wasn't attacked. Considering this, the last place that had been attacked was the 8th floor, right? I don't remember much, but the enemy attacked with overwhelming force, so we would’ve needed a force on the same scale to match them. However, no one knew who repelled them. Albedo seemed to know, she is the supervisor of Nazarick after all, which would be strange if she didn't.”

Not bothered by the silent Sebas, Shalltear continued: "…She seems to be a step ahead, which annoys me. Who is the mysterious being on the 8th floor? Is it a character created by Ainz-sama?" Sebas had been created by Touch Me, Demiurge by Ulbert Alain Odle and Cocytus by Takemikazuchi. But even Shalltear didn't know who the highest of the 41 supreme beings, Ainz, Momonga created. It couldn't be that he didn't make anyone. And so, that character who was on the 8th floor, which Shalltear knew nothing about, was a logical deduction.

"…No, that should be impossible. I only heard a little about it, but the character created by Ainz-sama is called Pandora's Actor. His ability is on the same level as me and I heard he was the guardian of the deepest part of the treasury."

"There's someone like that?" Unlike Albedo, Shalltear wasn't given information about all the characters in Nazarick. That's why this was the first time she heard that name. Even though the treasury was only accessible with a ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, it would be strange if there were no guards. The deepest part of the treasury.

The high-grade magic items were all stored there, maybe some World class items as well. If that was the case, then Ainz, who had the highest position of the 41 Supreme Beings, would be most suited to create a character for that place. Shalltear felt her pride take a hit for not being able to guard that exalted place, but she consoled herself, thinking that it couldn't be helped. She believed that stopping the invaders from reaching the 3rd floor in the first place was also a huge responsibility, just as important as guarding the treasury. Moreover, it was the duty that had been given to her by her own creator…

"There is, but I have never met him before, since it's impossible to reach that area without a ring."

"Oh…" Shalltear responded weakly, apparently having lost her interest, but Sebas didn't seem to mind. "In the end, the 8th floor is still a mystery… What a shame."

"That's right, even we can't go in there, there must be something there."

"What is that something you speak of?"

"Maybe there is a mechanism that would even attack us?"

"Hmm, you might be correct, but my guess would be… It's a trap that kills everyone indiscriminately?"

"The Great Tomb of Nazarick was made with the delicate care of the Supreme Beings. With loyal servants like us giving our all to protect it that level of trap shouldn't be able to stop them if they could make it to the 7th floor…"

"Want to sneak a peek?"

A child who thought of a naughty idea, Shalltear was smiling just like that. Sebas was smiling as usual, but it was deeper than normal. "You want to go against Ainz-sama's wishes?"

"Kidding, just kidding. Just a joke, don't make such a scary face."

“Shalltear… Curiosity killed the cat. What we should do is wait quietly, until the moment when Ainz-sama is willing to tell us.”

“You are right… Well then, did the prey took the bait?”

The sudden change in topic didn't make Sebas say anymore, and gave a direct answer: “Yes, bait, hook and sinker. All that's left is reeling it in.” After a slight nod, Shalltear licked her lips happily, her red eyes glinting unnaturally. Sebas who immediately understand why Shalltear was displaying such emotions, judged this to be a great chance to relay Solution's request: “Regarding this part, there is something I want to ask of Shalltear.”

“…What is it?”

While imagining what was going to happen and immersing herself in its joy, Shalltear was interrupted and said in a displeased voice. Sebas continued in a soothing manner: “The driver of this carriage, could you give him to this girl?”

“…Is he a small fry?”

“Yes, he is just a mouth piece.” Shalltear closed her eyes and fell into deep thought when she heard this request.

Considering all the possibilities, she apparently found an answer and nodded: “In that case it's fine. He probably won't even taste good even if I sucked his blood.”

“I am very grateful, thank you for your generosity, Shalltear.”

“Thank you, Shalltear-sama.”

“Ah, it's no big deal. Don't mention it.” Shalltear smiled affectionately at Solution, it was unexpected of her to have such a warm expression.

Following that, Shalltear went back to her usual self and gazed at Sebas: “I misspoke just now, so now we are even.”

“I understand… I never thought Shalltear would ever do something so foolish. You were just joking back then, right?”

“That's it, you are right. If Sebas had said the same thing, I would’ve thought you were joking as well. I would then send my minions to spy on you without a word, chop off your limbs if you show any sign of betrayal and drag you before Ainz-sama in chains.”

“I am not as vicious as you, Shalltear.”

“Really? That makes me more suspicious of your loyalty, I think you would absolutely do that, right?”

Shalltear and Sebas looked at each other with heartfelt joy and smiled. “Anyway, I adore cute girls the most. Giving him to Solution is a different joy in itself—”

“Well then, how do you intend to capture them? With spells like ‘Paralyze’ or ‘Bind Person’?” Before heading to E-Rantel, Ainz gave Sebas the order to 'capture humans who know martial arts or magic, but do so for criminals that won't pose a problem even if they disappear.' So as part of the plan, Sebas and Solution played the role of a rich willful daughter and the butler who had to clean up her mess, waiting patiently for a fish like Zach to bite. Shalltear's task was to use this fish to haul in the school of fish following behind.

“That is impossible, I wouldn't put in so much effort. Ainz-sama said it would be fine to turn them into slaves after sucking them dry, but we absolutely have to catch them. But, investigating one by one would take a lot of time, so just suck them all dry.” Sebas didn’t say ‘I see’, and just nodded. But now, he had to admit the choice of Shalltear made him uncomfortable.

With this judgement, Sebas had to speak his mind: “From this point of view, Demiurge-sama would be a better choice. Similar to Aura-sama’s breath, he can control the will of others freely.” Demiurge had the ‘Domination Mantra’ special skill, which was a powerful mind control technique. In a mission that required the capture of the target, it would be exceptionally effective.

“…Huh?” Shalltear suddenly made an unbelievably low pitch sound. The atmosphere inside the carriage became heavy, covered by a chilling air. Even the horses pulling the carriage felt it, and the carriage shook violently. The vampires seated on both sides of Shalltear turned even paler while Solution, who was besides Sebas, was shivering. Even Sebas who was on the same level as Shalltear felt goose bumps.

The killing intent of the most powerful Floor Guardian in Nazarick. Her hostility was telling of how her quibbles with Aura were just playful banter. If there was a misstep in dealing with this, it would definitely spark a battle to the death. Shalltear, who brought the atmosphere within the carriage to a freezing point, had bloodshot eyes. Spreading from her red pupils, her eyes were entirely dyed in red.

“Sebas… Could you say that again? Or a draconian like you wants to use this form—” The completely red eyes moved: “And fight to the death like this?”

“I misspoke, please forgive me. I was just feeling uneasy, it would be great if your ‘Blood Frenzy’ doesn’t activate.” Shalltear answered Sebas with silence. Sebas could tell that her momentary silence meant she was feeling uneasy about herself too.

In Yggdrasil, powerful classes were given weaknesses and handicaps in order to balance the game. One of the few handicaps given to Shalltear was ‘Blood Frenzy’, the more blood her body was getting covered in, the stronger her urge to slaughter would become. Although her combat strength would increase, it came at the price of losing control over her mind.

Ainz chose Shalltear, who might ignore orders or even lose control, for this mission by using the process of elimination. Albedo had to protect the Great Tomb of Nazarick, as for the remaining two Guardians — Shalltear and Cocytus — if you observe from a distance, Shalltear was more humanlike.

Following this, Shalltear took several deep breaths. She seemed to be cooling down her wrath, and at the same time suppressing the uneasiness in her heart. After a final, deep breath, Shalltear

returned to her normal expression — a seductive and lusty girl — and her eyes returned to its usual color.

"…Simply put, they would turn into slaves after we suck their blood, so that would be much simpler. There's no need to bring them back alive, Ainz-sama brought this point up before. Also, I will definitely suppress the 'Blood Frenzy'." By sucking all their blood, vampires could turn a target into a low-tier undead that was absolutely obedient towards their master.

Vampires were only able to create lesser vampires with intelligence far below their own, but Shalltear could create vampires with an intelligence on the level of a human. Although there was a limit to how many vampires she could create, if dead or alive didn't matter, Shalltear could be considered an excellent hunter as well…

"That's right, you need not say more, I will definitely finish Ainz-sama's mission smoothly. I will let Ainz-sama praise me like 'Well done Shalltear, you are my most important slave', and then say 'You are the one most suitable to be by my side'."

"Please forgive my shallow thoughts." Those were Sebas' sincere thoughts, other than apologizing to Shalltear for his rudeness, he was expressing his apology for another person.

"I didn't realized my words were also disrespectful towards Ainz-sama who appointed you, I am very sorry. Forgive me for displeasing you." Next, he lowered his head and apologized to Solution and the vampires too, at this moment, there was a violent vibration from the carriage, and a neigh from the horses pulling the carriage. "…The carriage seems to be stopping."

"Indeed." Imagining her master praising her after completing the mission, Shalltear who was immersed in happiness came to her senses. She smiled like a mischievous girl plotting a prank while Sebas smiled at her while stroking his beard.

Part 4

Coming out from the nearby forest were ten strong men. They surrounded the carriage in a semicircle. These men all carried different equipment. Though the quality of their equipment wasn't great, one couldn't say that it was poor either. One could tell that the weapons were chosen quite carefully. The men were discussing about what to do with their prey, such as who would go first. The fact that they seemed completely complacent was obvious.

After all, they had already done this several times before. This time shouldn't be any different, so they had no reason be nervous. Zach jumped down from the carriage's driver seat and jogged to these men. Before he had jumped off the driver's seat, he had cut the reins to prevent the carriage from being driven away, he also rigged the carriage door so that it could only be opened from one side, the side that was facing the men.

The men flaunted their weapons for their prey to see. It was as if they were giving silent warning that if they didn't come out immediately, they would be hurt badly. As if they were reacting to the warning, the carriage door slowly opened. A beautiful girl appeared under the moonlight. The gathered mercenaries and bandits showed lewd smiles and looked at her with gazes full of lust. Their delighted expressions could be seen clearly.

However, there was someone who was surprised: Zach. Using one sentence to explain his surprise would be 'Who is this?'. Zach had never seen this beauty before, despite being familiar with the carriage. The discrepancy confused him, rendering him speechless. Then, another girl with the same outfit appeared right after her. Some of the men showed a confused smile because their target should be just one gullible, rich girl and her old butler.

Yet another seemingly young girl appeared behind the two, and the sight of her immediately made them forget all their doubts. Her silky hair shone brilliantly under the moonlight, and her dewy, crimson eyes displayed otherworldly seductiveness. To see such a gorgeous and beautiful girl appearing before them, the bandits could only sigh to themselves. They couldn't even utter a word of compliment while being so dazed. This moment proved that for something truly beautiful to show up suddenly, even the desire of beasts will dwindle.

Bathed in the gaze of these charmed men, Shalltear showed an obscene and seductive smile. She then nonchalantly walked to the front of the men: "Everyone, thank you for gathering here for me. Ah yes, who is the leader out of all of you? May I negotiate with him for a bit?" Seeing the gazes of the bandits resting on one of their own, Shalltear obtained the information she wanted. Which meant that except for that one, the others were not needed.

"Wh… What do you want to negotiate?" After seeing the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, the man who seemed to be their leader finally regained his composure and stepped forward. "Aaah, forgive me. The negotiation was just a joke to in order to obtain the information I wanted. Please excuse me."

"Who the hell are you people…"

Shalltear looked to Zach as he asked the question: "So you're the guy named Zach? I will give you to Solution as promised, so could you please step aside?" A few of the bandits became confused, and in search for answers they started looking at each other, but among these men—

"Hmph, just a little wench. Your body is quite nice, in a bit I will make you weep." The bandit, who happened by chance to be in front of Shalltear, reached out to touch the full breasts that didn't really fit a girl of such young age. But then the hand fell to the ground. "Could you not touch me with your dirty hand?" The shocked man looked toward his arm that had lost its hand. After delay, he howled: "Arrghhhh— Ha, Hand, my hand—!"

"You only lost one hand, why are you screaming so much? Can you still call yourself a man?" Shalltear muttered a little and waved her hand nonchalantly. Like that the man's head fell onto the ground. How is it possible for her to manage to cut off the man's head, using nothing but her unarmed and delicate hand? Like a scene from nightmare, it all felt too surreal and the bandits became terrified. The men were unable to react because of their shock. However, the oncoming horrible sight brought everyone back to reality.

The blooded started gushing out from the neck just like a fountain. As if the blood had a will of its own, it gathered above Shalltear and formed a ball of blood. Shalltear's companions knew that this scene was caused by her special skill 'Blood Pool'. But these bandits didn't know of such inhuman skills. The very first thought that came into their mind was: "It's a magic caster!"

If some of them understood magic properly, they might've been able to issue a more specific warning. 'Magic caster' was just a general term, depending on the profession there were all kinds of subdivisions and the ways of dealing with each of them were different from each other. After having seen Shalltear's dress, the first thing that should have come to their minds was arcane magic, followed by the ability to control minds. Since they didn't issue any specific warning, one could safely conclude that the other party was completely lacking any fundamental knowledge of magic.

In other words, whenever they saw something they failed to understand, they would believe it to be magic. Shalltear understood that these men didn't know any better, she then looked at them with disinterest. The panicking bandits hurriedly raised their weapons in defence. "So boring, I'll leave what's left to you guys. Only leave this and that guy… Got it?"

"Yes, Shalltear-sama."

The vampires who followed close behind Shalltear, they walked up and bashed the face of the bandit who was swinging his sword at Shalltear, flinging him backwards. The scene was as if someone was hitting with a metal bat using all his might. It was like the sound made when a balloon that was filled with liquid had exploded. The bandit flew across the air with his limbs flailing, accompanied by sprays of blood and brain matter. The fluid sparkled in the moonlight, making it even more beautiful due to the element of horror.

More than half of the skull had ruptured and had been knocked away flying. The brain spluttered and fell out of the cracked skull and only then did the body finally drop to the ground with a wet sound. The sound gave great horror and fright to the bandits, but it was like the first bell of battle which brought Shalltear great happiness.

Zach showed a stiff smile while looking at the scene in front of him. Such an inhuman scene. The nauseating heavy stench of blood, which was caused by vicious killing, made him want to vomit. Limbs of men were shredded like paper. The head that got grabbed by both hands exploded like a pomegranate being cracked open.

One bandit's stomach was pierced by bare hand after being forcibly stripped of his armor. The wet and glistening intestines were being pulled out for several meters. The bandit was still alive after this, which showed the tenacity of the humans. There was one rolling and crawling in pain on the floor. Because he tried to run away, both of his legs were brutally broken. From afar one could see white spots on his leg, the bones that had pierced through the muscle and skin.

Still, he tried to crawl away using his two hands. He was trying hard to get away from the hellish scene and the origin of horror. Even if it was only for a couple more moments, he still wanted to live. The otherworldly beautiful girl looked down at the men who were begging for their lives, and let out a shrill laugh.

How did it become like this… Zach tried very hard on finding an answer. No matter what kind of glorified words one chose to use, one could not disguise the fact that living beings follow the concept of 'Survival of the Fittest'. Fundamentally, whatever growth or progression there was in living beings, they evolved and pushed through because the strong preyed on the weak; it was the natural order of things. This was the exact belief Zach had always followed. Even so, was it okay for the strong to go overboard?

Of course not, there was no way he could acknowledge such cruel and vicious killing, but what could he do? The enemy just by chance hadn't attacked him yet. If he attempted to run away, the enemy might have done something to Zach to make him unable to escape, such as the painful and horrible torture he had just witnessed. Zach clutched his clothes and felt the shape of the sword that was hidden inside. *Oh why did this sword have to be so small? It would be impossible to fight using this short sword against a monster able to easily dismember a man.* What should he do then? He cannot imagine himself affecting those monsters in any way.

Zach seemed to be trying to hide himself, and crouched and hugged himself with both of his arms. He thought the rhythmic chattering of his teeth was so loud and what would he do if those monsters heard this sound and came looking for him. Though he tried his hardest on calming himself since his life was depended on not being found, he was still unable to stop his teeth from chattering. *Speaking of which, who the hell are these people?* Zach didn't recognize them at all. As he was thinking—

"Zach-san, come here." Suddenly, a mellow voice, which didn't match the cruel scene in front of him, came from behind Zach. He looked back in deep horror, and there he found his employer. The expression shown by his mistress was not her usual haughty one. If he had been calm enough, he might've been on guard against her, but he was greatly confused by this scene of horror filled with the stench of blood, and didn't had the presence of mind to notice her unusual behavior.

"What are those monsters?!" Zach shrieked at the supposedly gullible and rich girl: "If there were monsters like them, why didn't you tell me!" That was right, if he knew, things wouldn't have become like this. The horrible and terrifying scene in front of him was all caused by this bitch. "Say something, hurry and say something! Know that? This was all caused by you!" In his great anxiety and horror, Zach felt angry and impatient. He impulsively grabbed Solution's collar and shook her roughly.

"…I got it, please come with me."

"You… You will you save me?"

"No, as my last chance, I want to enjoy and savor you entirely." A cold and pristine hand grabbed onto Zach's hand. Like this, Solution led him away. "Because Sebas-sama doesn't like these kind of things very much. Though I already obtained permission, I still want us to be a bit further away."

Zach didn't understand what she was saying, but he thought that if he was being led to another place perhaps he still had a chance at surviving. Zach pretended not to hear the unending howls and screams coming from behind him. This couldn't be helped, because Zach was so weak. There was no way to save those companions who were supposedly much stronger than Zach.

"Please don't be too rough, if it's possible… I hope you can be gentle, then I will be very happy." Behind the carriage, Solution whispered to Zach in a low voice. Her hand reached towards her back, as if to take off her beautiful dress. Seeing this scene, Zach was greatly startled, what the hell was this girl doing? His eyes looked as if he was seeing an odd creature for the first time, and he couldn't tear his gaze from Solution. Her hand didn't seem to be stopping, and Zach, who was greatly confused, opened his mouth and asked: "Y-You… What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?"

Like that, Solution continued to slowly strip off her corset. As if only waiting for this exact moment, the restrained twin peaks bounced outward. The delicate and perky round shapes, with skin as white as snow, glowed under the luminescent moonlight. The scene before Zach made him gulp. “Please.” As if begging to be touched tenderly, Solution pointed her bare breasts toward Zach. “What do you want me to do…”

Zach forgot himself, only to stare intently at the naked body in front of him. So beautiful, this girl had the most beautiful and alluring body out of all the women Zach had seen in his life. Before, of all those embraced by Zach, the most beautiful was undoubtedly the girl assaulted by him on a carriage while they were traveling on the road. But when it was Zach’s turn, the girl was already dead tired and laid there unmoving. She only opened her legs widely like a frog. Even so, he still thought of her as beautiful and lovely.

But the girl in front of him is even more beautiful than her, and isn’t lifeless like back then. As if being lit by the flame of desire, he started to feel warmth in his groin. He could only pant like a dog, and slid his hand toward Solution’s body. As if touching cloth made of silk… It was that kind of sensation.

He could bear no longer, and grabbed her perky and well-shaped bosom. The hand sunk in just like that. The feeling was so soft it felt as if his whole hand had sunk in, Zach thought of this initially. But after looking toward his hand, he immediately noticed it wasn’t like that. Literally, Zach’s hand really had sunk into Solution’s body.

“Wh… What the hell is this!” The unimaginable sight made Zach scream and he attempted to take his hand back. But no matter how hard he tried to pull, he couldn’t pull his hand back. Not only could he not pull his hand back, it was trying to pull him in. It was like there were many tentacles inside Solution’s body, and those tentacles firmly grabbed onto Zach’s hand and continued to pull him in. Solution’s beautiful and well-proportioned face remained calm during such an odd situation, only to stare at Zach silently. Like a scientist looking at a lab animal that has been injected with deadly poison, she was looking at him with gaze that held both cold mercilessness and great curiosity.

“Hey, st… Stop! Let me go!” Zach held a fist with his other hand, and mustered all his strength to strike at Solution’s beautiful face. Once, twice, three times… It’s fine even if he hurt his fist, Zach used all of his strength to strike at her head. The face of hers, though it was struck repeatedly by a full-grown man, she remained unconcerned and didn’t even move an inch. It’s as if she didn’t feel any pain at all.

But for Zach who was struggling for his life, the feeling was different and strange as he struck her again, and all the hair on his body stood up on its end. The feeling was as if he were hitting a leather bag filled with water. In a normal situation, there would be feeling of rebound from striking with your fist. But all of its force was absorbed and there was no feeling of striking any bones. This was *not* what hitting somebody is supposed to feel like.

He was distracted by his lust and excitement, but now he suddenly remembered the scene of the hell and abomination that was behind him. Zach suppressed his urge to scream. He finally understood. This naked girl was also a monster. “You finally noticed? Then, here’s the main act?” Before he could reply, it felt as if hundreds of thousands of needles had stuck into his arm and the pain almost made him faint. “AHHHHH—!”

“I am dissolving your arm.” While in severe pain he heard her cold voice, but he was unable to understand the meaning. This was already a scenario that’s out of Zach’s understanding. “Truthfully, I like to watch things as they dissolve. Because Zach-san said he would very much like to be in me, so our feelings were quite mutual. It made me very happy that you feel this way.”

“Ahhhh—! Fucking die, monster!” While trying to bear with the severe pain, Zach took out his concealed short sword. Like that, with all his strength he stabbed the lovely face of Solution. As result, Solution’s body shook a bit.

“Serves you right!” But Zach noticed his thought to be premature. How was this different from stabbing at a pond? At most, little ripples appeared on the surface of the water, and that was all had happened. Solution kept her cold and observing expression even with a sword in her. She gazed intently at Zach, and whispered in a low voice: “So sorry, I have immunity to physical attacks, so this type of attack cannot harm me. This too shall dissolve.”

An acidic stench emitted. It was only after a couple of seconds, the handle of the sword fell from Solution’s face onto the floor. It was as she said, a beautiful unblemished face that was the same as before once again appeared in front of Zach. “Who… What the hell are you?”

The severe pain from his arm was still not subsiding, but the horror of death in front of him was even more terrible than the pain. His terror almost made him forget the pain. With tears on his face, he asked. But the answer was so horrible he wanted to cover his ears. “I am a preying type ooze. Time is limited, so I must swallow you now.”

The force of suction of Solution’s body became even stronger and he was pressed into her inch by inch. It was pointless for Zach to resist. “Stop stop stop stop pleeeaase stop—! Please forgive me, spare me please—!” Zach screamed and cried, and continued to beg. But the force that’s pulling Zach was so strong, mere human had no way to resist. His arm, shoulder, and upper body continued to be swallowed inside her.

“Lilia!” Zach cried out this name as his last word before his face and head too got swallowed into Solution. It was like a snake swallowing its prey whole, Zach’s entire body was now inside Solution. Only few minutes have passed since the attack, but there were already no survivors left. The place was filled with the stench of blood that’s quite unpleasant to the nose.

No, one man was still alive. He groveled under Shalltear on both of his knees, and he was furiously moving his tongue licking. He was licking the blood and brains off Shalltear’s high heels that were dirtied when she, for fun, stepped on and crushed a bandit’s skull. Shalltear satisfyingly looked at her now shiny and clean stiletto.

“Thanks for your hard work. As promised, I will spare your life.” The terrified man showed an ugly grimace. While groveling he showed a thankful gaze toward Shalltear, and kept on kowtowing to thank her. Shalltear showed an affectionate expression to the dog-like man, and flicked her finger.

“Suck.” The two vampires came to be beside him, the man finally knew what she had meant all along. “You will still live as an undead, so you can’t say I lied to you, okay?” Unable to hold themselves back, the vampires bit into the man. Shalltear glanced sideways as the man’s life force

was taken gulp by gulp. Solution, with her disheveled collar and clothes, walked up to Shalltear from behind the carriage, who then asked: “Hm, so it’s all done?”

“Yes, I am very satisfied. Thank you very much, Shalltear-sama.”

“Not at all, because we’re both from Nazarick as companions. Ah, so did that human have his fun?”

“He’s currently enjoying it, would you like a look?”

“Eh? Really? Then let me see a little.”

A man’s arm suddenly burst out from Solution’s face, accompanied by a pungent smell. The stench came from the arm. Because of the strong acid, the skin was gone and the muscles were already half rotted. Since blood oozed out from the muscle and reacted with the acid, acrid smoke could be seen wafting off. It was like an arm that was reaching up from under a pond, trying to grab onto something and kept on twisting and flailing around. Every time it struggled, the exposed rotted muscle oozed out liquid and blood.

“I apologize, I didn’t know he was still so energetic.” Solution apologized with an arm still flailing on her face. She then roughly shoved the struggling and flailing arm back inside her. After the arm was completely inside her, she again let out a smile. “That’s impressive! Even though you swallowed a man whole, one cannot tell at all from your outside appearance.”

“Thank you for your compliment. You can’t tell from the outside because my inside is quite empty. I am that kind of being, so I guess there are special magic effects taking place.”

“Hmm, I see. I hope I am not poking my nose into your business, but when will he die?”

“Well, if I want to kill immediately I can emit stronger acid, but it’s such a rare chance for a man wanting to enter me, so I want him to at least enjoy it for a day or two.”

“I am not hearing any screams, is it because of the acid?”

“Not at all. If I use acid to dissolve his vocal cords, he might die from suffocation, so I used a part of my body to enter his throat and suppress his screams. It also prevents foul odors from leaking.”

“You take such a good care of your plaything, I quite admire that you can play with it up to its last moment.”

“Another thing, can you choose which body-parts you want to use acid to dissolve? For example, if you only want one part of the prey to be dissolved?”

“Yes, that’s no problem and it’s actually quite easy. The proof is that there are still some potions and scrolls inside me, and they’re safe. I can move freely even if Shalltear-sama were to enter my body, of course only if you don’t move around too much.”

“Preying ooze type is quite impressive… Nnhh. Let’s play together next time?”

“No problem, but… Where do you plan to look for the toys?” Shalltear noticed that Solution was looking at the vampires behind her, and showed a delighted smile.

“These girls are actually quite entertaining, but I want to wait until someone invades Nazarick and is captured. I will request Ainz-sama to gift them to me.”

“Okay, please leave me a share too. Next time, I want to swallow them up to their chest area and leave the other parts out. It should be fun like that.”

“Not bad, you should get along pretty well with that inquisitor right?”

“You mean Neuronist-sama? That special information investigator? It’s regretful that I don’t quite understand too much of Neuronist-sama’s art.”

Shalltear wanted to continue her chat with Solution, but a voice came from behind her and interrupted their conversation. “Solution, preparations are complete here. It’s about time for us to leave.” After replacing the horses’ reins, Sebas shouted from the carriage’s driver seat. “Okay, I will be right there. Then Shalltear-sama, though I would very much like to continue chatting with you, please excuse me for now.”

Shalltear looked toward Solution’s back as she hurried to the carriage, then to Sebas who was sitting on the driver’s seat. “Then, Sebas, I guess we will temporarily part ways.”

“I see, so you’ve found their lair?”

“Yes, I will go there in a moment. I am going to look if there is somebody with useful information that will make Ainz-sama happy. It seems our efforts were in vain this time.”

“I see. It was a pleasure working with you, Shalltear-sama.”

“Thank you for your hard work, let’s meet up in Nazarick later.”

“Yes, take care—”

OVERLORD 3 The bloody valkyrie

第二章 真祖

True Vampire

Part 1

Two shadows could be seen moving full speed through the forest. They were Shalltear's servants and concubines; the vampire brides. They cleaved through the narrow trail laden with sharp branches. Despite this, not a single scratch or blemish could be seen on either of their dresses. Even while wearing high heels, the two vampires moved with unreal speed. The one in front was carefully carrying Shalltear, while the one bringing up the rear was dragging what seemed to be a shriveled, old log.

Their current location wasn't that far from where they parted with Sebas. Although they had no way of measuring the distance to their destination, they knew they still had ways to go. Suddenly, a sharp, metallic noise broke out, and the vampire in the front came to a halt. Because the trail was so narrow, the one following from behind had no choice but to stop as well.

"Why have you suddenly stopped?" As she was about to answer the voice behind her, a chilling gaze from her mistress she was carrying in her arms washed over the vampire that caused her body to tremble. The sense of danger crawling up her spine was because she knew her master was neither kind nor forgiving. Her master, Shalltear, who was now cradled in her arms like a princess, shifted her feet in displeasure. Sensing the cue, the vampire lowered her arms.

Shalltear jumped, like a bird flying out of its cage. After a brief respite in the air, a delicate pair of legs in high heels landed on the earth. Her dress followed suit and gently flowed over her legs, hiding them from view. Shalltear brushed aside her long silvery hair in irritation, and tilted her head. Under her icy glare, the vampire couldn't help but gulp in fear.

"What is the problem?" The reason Shalltear didn't run herself was simply because it was bothersome, and because she didn't want to get her shoes dirty. There was another reason, but no one present would even think it, much less speak it out loud. Even in Nazarick, there was only a handful who would dare say it in her presence.

As her servant, the vampire was acting as her feet, and forbidden to stop unless instructed otherwise by Shalltear herself. Feet that didn't listen to its owner were useless. Depending on the reason, she might receive severe punishment. No, it would be a relief if it only went that far. The vampire could detect killing intent in her master's question.

Excluding those created directly by the Supreme Rulers of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the power over life and death over the other minions is held by the Floor Guardians and Area Guardians. To further incur Shalltear's displeasure past this point would mean certain death.

Realizing that her next words might be her last, the vampire slowly opened her mouth to beg for forgiveness: "Please forgive me. I stepped on a bear trap." Shalltear shifted her gaze to the vampire's foot and saw that it was indeed caught by a reinforced steel trap. Rather than humans, the trap was meant for wild animals like bears.

If a human were to get caught in it, even if he was wearing greaves, the trap would have fractured the bone. However, a vampire was completely different from a normal human in every aspect. Although the trap was snapped firmly around her ankles, rather than a fracture, the vampire didn't even seem to be in pain. In fact, she didn't even seem to consider it an injury.

A vampire's natural defenses allowed them to brush off most conventional physical attacks. In order to get around this, one would need to use a magic weapon forged with silver or similar metals. Needless to say, an ordinary bear trap wouldn't even be able to deal any damage to a vampire, much less leave an actual wound. As soon as the snare was ripped open, the holes in the skin left by its teeth would heal immediately.

However, even when the trap itself did no damage, it was showing its effectiveness as a tool to ensnare its victims. In the first place, the lack of poison made it obvious that the trap wasn't meant to be fatal. Rather, its purpose was to create a casualty and hinder the opponent's movements.

"Hurry and free yourself."

"Yes! Understood!" Having received Shalltear's order, the vampire grabbed both sides of the trap with her slender hands and pulled. Unable to withstand the strength exceeding that of a bear, the trap opened its jaws and released its prey. A beauty prying open a bear trap. For those who don't know the strength of a vampire, it would have been a surreal scene.

"Seeing as how there's a trap here, we may not be that far from the scheduled place. Just a bit farther, I believe."

"Yes. Please give me a moment." The vampire in the back flung what she was carrying to the ground. The object appeared to be a mummified corpse of a human, bled of all its moisture. But they would have never bothered to carry along a simple, ordinary corpse. Sure enough, the body that was sprawled on the ground showed signs of life and began to move.

At the tip of its hands were sharp claws. A red light, much like those belonging to a vampire, burned in its empty eye sockets. Razor sharp canines sprouted from between its slightly parted mouth. A lesser vampire. With all of its blood sucked dry, it was one of the bandits that attacked them previously.

"I have a question for you. Are we near your hideout?" The lesser vampire turned to its master and nodded deeply. It let out a voice that was neither a moan nor a scream. "It says we are, Shalltear-sama."

"I see. Why didn't they prepare more traps?"

Instead of stopping with a single bear trap, it would've been more advantageous for them to have prepared an alarm system or more traps. However, they were nowhere to be found. Shalltear began to survey her surroundings. Believing that their master was looking for anyone hiding their presence in the area, the two vampire brides followed suit. Only when Shalltear shook her head did they stop.

"…It's alright. It's not like you have any searching skills anyway…" Upon hearing her mutter those words, the vampire realized why she was forgiven. Including her master, the three of them

did not have any skills for finding traps, and thus would not have been able to notice the bear trap before it was sprung. That must have been why she was spared. Her master did not punish others for failing a task that was impossible to begin with.

“It may have been better for us to borrow the girl.” Solution’s class was one that dealt in assassinations. For her, who possessed skills from the Rogue class as well, it would have been easy to detect traps. “Well, there’s no point in complaining about it now. Let’s hurry to the bandit hideout.” Before long, they arrived at the vicinity of the mercenary hideout. As they neared their destination, the clumps of trees began to thin out, and eventually disappeared completely. What greeted the party was a stretch of prairie with a few rocks jutting out from the ground.

They had arrived at the land of Karst. At the heart of a flower-shaped basin, was a large hole dug into the surface. A faint light could be seen seeping out from the hole. From the light, the inside was probably a gentle slope that continued downwards. The two structures that stood on either side of the cave entrance were obviously man-made.

There stood two wooden barricades, each about half as tall as a person. The craftsmanship was unremarkable at best. It was just a stack of logs held together by rope. Two guards were stationed at the entrance, with each standing behind a barricade. It seems their plan against intruders was to use the barricades as cover against arrows while raising the alarm.

In a normal battle, if they were to advance from here in plain view, without a doubt, reinforcements would come rushing out. The early alarm would allow their opponents ample time to make preparations. A slower approach, hidden under cover, was also impossible. The bandits had cleared the area of any boulders large enough to conceal a stealth approach.

Additionally, the ones stationed outside each had a large bell around their shoulder. Even if a surprise attack on the guards proved successful, the loud chiming would still alert the ones inside. Their defenses were well thought out. But there was one way to break through this seemingly hopeless situation. Magic. Cast ‘Silence’ and then kill them, or approach with ‘Invisibility’, or lure them out with ‘Charm Person’. Destroying the bells directly was also an option. While pondering which way would be the most enjoyable, Shalltear realized that she was missing a crucial piece of information.

“Is there only one entrance?” The lesser vampire stiffly nodded its head in affirmation. Shalltear’s face bloomed into a smile. If that’s the case, then there was nothing more to think about. A strongly fortified position is strong against surprise attacks, this holds true even when facing a superior number.

But it was different for Shalltear and her party. For those with overwhelming power, there was absolutely no problem with meeting these humans head on. It was a simple matter to crush them like the insects they were. Their only worry would be another exit for their prey to escape.

“Well, we came all this way so there’s no need to hide anymore, is there? It isn’t in my nature to skulk around like a spy.”

“Shalltear-sama is always shining brightly, after all.”

“Stating the obvious isn’t flattery. If you want to flatter me then put more thought into it next time.” Ignoring her servant that was now begging for forgiveness, Shalltear reached out her hand and grabbed the lesser vampire. “I’m giving you the important mission of being the vanguard. Now, go.”

With a flick of her skinny arm, Shalltear threw the lesser vampire, and a sound like air being torn apart exploded. The scrawny, corpse-like body spun into the air countless times, and spiraled towards one of the sentries in the distance. Upon impact, the sentry’s head and chest exploded into a bloody mist. It was a scene that was hard to believe. The smell of blood was fresh in the air. The other sentry looked at the cruel remains of his partner in a daze, as if he couldn’t process what had just happened. To the one who did the throwing, it was a delightful spectacle.

“Strike~”

“Fantastic, Shalltear-sama.” The two vampires excitedly clapped their hands while Shalltear raised her hands in celebration. Needless to say, the lesser vampire’s body was also obliterated along with the sentry, but no one really cared about that. Since it wasn’t even a member of Nazarick in the first place, there was no need to show concern for the death of a toy. There’s no way Shalltear would remember a promise made with a human, either.

“Hmm, there’s one more, isn’t there?” As Shalltear looked around, the two vampires quickly presented a sufficiently large rock. “Oomph.” As a bell chimed in the distance, Shalltear grasped the rather large rock in her hand. Her arm moved at a frightening speed. A moment later, Shalltear happily announced her accomplishment. “Hmm. This time… We can call that… Two strikes.”

Another round of applause. The sentries inside the cave who heard the bell were yelling that enemies have appeared. They were so loud that the group could hear them all the way from where they were. Shalltear smiled softly towards the growing noise from within the cave and commanded. “Now, go. You, climb a tree in the area and watch for anyone trying to run away. And you, get up front and lead the way. But, if a strong one shows up, it’s mine. Be sure to tell me.”

“Yes, Shalltear-sama.”

“Please have a safe trip.” The vampire that was given the order moved in front of Shalltear. As she slowly walked towards the entrance, the vampire… Disappeared. The ground gave away, no, it was a trap. Shalltear may have been able to move out of the way, but a normal vampire’s agility wasn’t enough to react to the ground vanishing beneath their feet.

“Aw~” The vampire was a low level servant lacking any skills to detect traps. Such an outcome was inevitable. Shalltear knew this, which is why she forgave her for the earlier mistake. But even so, she couldn’t keep the disappointment out of her voice. A laugh escaped her lips; one that was neither awkward nor sweet. Thinking back, it should’ve been obvious that they would have laid a trap in front of the entrance. Her own foolishness at failing to deduce this beforehand, and the fact that her servant actually got caught in it, was aggravating.

These thoughts swirled inside her and were released through Shalltear’s smile. Most of all, the fact that a servant of Shalltear Bloodfallen, the Floor Guardian in charge of multiple levels of the Great Tomb of Nazarick got caught by such a pathetic trap was something she couldn’t tolerate. A voice filled with killing intent spilled out of Shalltear’s scarlet lips.

“I’m going to kill you, so come out immediately.” With a large leap, the vampire showed herself at the edge of the trap. Except for her dress being dirtied with mud, she appeared unwounded. “Do not disappoint me any further.”

“Forgive—”

“Leave it. Hurry up and go. Or would you like me to throw you like that trash over there?” Seeing Shalltear motioning as if to grab her, the vampire understood what her master meant and let out a small yelp. Shalltear watched as her servant scurried into the cave, and slowly followed her inside.

Part 2

Inside a private room, a man stopped maintaining his weapon and focused his ears on the noise. The bustle of people running, faint screams in the distance. It was obvious they were under attack, but the enemy’s strength and numbers were unknown despite the fact that they were trained to shout such crucial information. There was no way he just didn’t happen to hear them either. Even if he was inside a room, it was just a makeshift hole in the wall with a curtain serving as a door. Although the curtain was thick, it was nowhere near enough to block out voices entirely.

Their mercenary group, ‘Death Spreading Brigade’ had seventy members. Although none of them were as strong as him, some were veterans who had survived many battles. There was no way men like them would fall into this much disarray from a small party. Did that mean the enemy arrived in force? But there wasn’t enough noise to indicate a large battle, and he couldn’t sense the presence of that many foes either.

“Then… Adventurers?” Few in number, but powerful in combat, then this uncomfortable feeling would make sense. The man slowly stood up and strapped his weapon to his waist. For armor, he equipped a chainmail. It was easy to wear and didn’t take too much time to put on. Next, he grabbed a leather pouch containing several ceramic potion bottles and secured it to his belt with a knot. Having already equipped his necklace and ring, which were infused with protection magic, the preparations were complete.

The man threw open the curtains, as if he wanted to rip them from the hinges, and then stepped out into the makeshift hallway. Lined an equal distance apart, the hallway was lit by plundered ‘Continual Light’ lanterns so bright that it was hard to believe it was the inside of a cave. The light revealed his full appearance. Hidden underneath the clothes, his body was lean but not skinny, and his muscles were tough as steel and tempered through experience, rather than training.

His hair was cut haphazardly, the length was uneven, and it pointed outwards in random directions. His brown eyes glared straight ahead, and a sneer was plastered on his lips. The stubble on his chin gave it the appearance of mold. Although his appearance was untidy, his movements were smooth and elegant, similar to that of a wild beast. As he walked towards the entrance where the attack was taking place, another man was heading in his direction. He recognized the familiar face as one of his allies. As soon as the other man spotted him, his face brightened in relief, as if to say victory was now assured.

“What’s going on?”

“Enemy attack, Brain-san!” The man called Brain laughed bitterly and responded. “I know that, the attackers? Who are they?”

“There are two of them, both women.”

“Women? And only two? Blue Rose… No, that’s impossible.” With his head turned slightly in thought, Brain continued to head towards the source of the disturbance. The strongest adventurer party in the kingdom was called ‘Blue Rose’ and was made up of five women.

A while back, he had encountered an old woman who could match him blow for blow and the two had fought to a draw. There was also a rumor that the greatest assassin of the Empire was a woman. Strong women were not uncommon. After all, the difference of physical strength between a man and a woman could easily be filled by magic.

Of course, the strongest body coupled with the strongest magical power would mean that person was invincible. Brain could feel his heart swell in anticipation at the thought of fighting an opponent strong enough to attack them head on. “Ah, you don’t have to come with me. Head back inside and strengthen the defenses.”

After telling the mercenary such, Brain put strength into his steps and walked towards the strong opponents from the surface. Brain Unglaus. Originally a farmer, he was gifted with what could only be described as a God-given talent in the mastery of the sword. Coupled with his natural talent, he had never lost with a weapon in hand. Even in the battlefield, he was a genius whose worst injury was a scratch.

Having never known defeat with the sword, he had always walked a path of victory. Everyone around him believed it, and he himself never doubted his skill. However, a dramatic change came into his life at a tournament held in the Kingdom’s palace. It wasn’t as if he joined with the aim of being the champion. He simply wanted to show his skill to the rest of the Kingdom. He believed that they would kneel to his strength. But the result, he faced an unbelievable situation.

Defeat. His first loss since he first held the sword, no, possibly since he’d been born. The one who defeated him was a man named Gazef Stronoff. He was now serving as the Warrior-Captain of Re-Estize, and known to be the strongest man in the surrounding nations. Both men had won all of their battles almost instantly, but the fight between them was long and drawn out, as if they had been saving all of their time for this one battle.

In the end, Gazef finished the battle using his martial art ‘Four-fold Slash of Light’. A battle that was still talked about to this day, no one questioned how a man of the lower class rose to the position of Warrior-Captain. It was a fight on a scale where even the nobles who disliked Gazef had to admit that he wasn’t weak.

The victor was showered with glory, but to the loser, it was as if everything Brain had built up to that point had come crashing down. Although the battle was close, Brain realized that his confidence of being the strongest was only a delusion born from the narrow-mindedness of a fool.

For one month, he locked himself away in his own world. A normal person would have drowned away his sorrows in alcohol, but Brain threw his despair aside and pulled himself together. He rejected countless offers for employment from nobles, and sought strength for the first time. In

pursuit of strength, he trained his body. In pursuit of magic, he gathered knowledge. A prodigy was working hard like an ordinary person. His defeat had elevated him to a new level.

The reason he had rejected offers from nobles was because he didn't want his skills to rust away. In order for him to train his skills to the utmost limit, he needed opponents. Since he didn't train himself just to show off, Brain needed work that provided ample opportunities to experience real battles while also bringing in money. It was possible to earn a fortune as an adventurer, but that path was closed to him. An adventurer's work offered little to no opportunities to fight against other humans. Cutting down monsters wasn't bad, but Brain's ultimate goal was to defeat Gazef. For that, he needed human opponents.

With his options limited, he chose to work as a member of the "Death Spreading Brigade". But in truth, any mercenary group would have suited him just fine. He had only one goal. To wipe clean his past shame, to turn his defeat into victory. In order to gain the strength to accomplish his goal, he needed a weapon. He was willing to throw away everything else for the weapon of his desires. Magic weapons were expensive, but the one he truly wanted wasn't any ordinary magic weapon.

Further south, past the Kingdom, was a city in the middle of a desert. Amongst the goods that occasionally flowed out from that city was a weapon that, even un-enchanted, far surpassed the cutting ability of ordinary magic weapons. It had a price to match, so much so that people's eyes would pop out of their sockets upon seeing it. That was the weapon he wanted. And then, he had finally managed to obtain a 'Katana'.

As he was right now, the current Brain's strength had risen to the limit of human potential. He was confident that he could easily defeat Gazef. Nevertheless, he had never once let that confidence get to his head and continued to train diligently every day. When he closed his eyes, even now, he could see it clearly, the image of Gazef during their great duel. He had easily dodged Brain's attack that no man before him could, and counterattacked with four simultaneous strikes. He could no longer remember his own appearance the moment he lost. Instead, what burned in his memory was the image of the victor who defeated him.

As Brain approached the entrance, the smell of fresh blood hung heavily in the air. He could no longer hear the screams, meaning that those who had been fighting near the entrance had all been killed. It had only been two or three minutes. The ten men stationed near the entrance were given the task of focusing on defence, to buy time for the rest to make preparations for the battle. To kill these men so quickly—

"If there are really only two of them, they must be as strong as I am." Brain's face broke out into a grin. He continued with quick steps and drank one of the potions in his belt pouch. A bitter, strong liquid flowed down his throat and into his stomach. He then downed another bottle.

He could feel the heat from his stomach spread out to every inch of his body. In response, the sound of his muscles expanding and growing stronger reached his ears. The rapid change was due to the strengthening effects of the potion. The first one he drank was a potion of 'Lesser Strength', while the second was of 'Lesser Dexterity'.

It wasn't necessary to ingest the potion directly for it to work; just spraying the correct dose on the body was enough. But Brain always thought that drinking it seemed more effective somehow. Of course, it could simply be his imagination, but imagination could sometimes draw strength where

there was none. He then drew his katana, and applied oil to the blade. The oil emitted a faint light, and soon disappeared, as if it was absorbed into the katana. The oil was called 'Magic Weapon', and although the effect was temporary, it infused the blade with magic that further boosted its sharpness.

"Activate 1, activate 2." The keywords triggered the necklace and ring he had equipped and a faint magic wrapped around his body. 'Necklace of Eye', as the name suggested, protected his eyes when activated. Resistance to blind status, night vision, light filtering. A warrior who couldn't land a hit was useless.

Hindering one's field of vision, or creating distance and attacking with ranged attacks are all common tactics used by adventurers. Brain had once lost to adventurers who used such tactics. 'Ring of Magic-bound' allowed its wearer to bind a low level spell to the item and invoke it with the ring as the catalyst. His ring carried 'Lesser Protection Energy', which allowed him to block elemental damage.

If there really were just two enemies, then this much preparation was necessary. It would be too late to regret not activating the effects beforehand later on. With this, the preparations were over. He gathered the overflowing heat emanating from his body and expelled it in one large breath.

As of this moment, with his strengthened physique, Brain had most likely achieved the peak of human strength. With the arrogance that could only stem from absolute confidence in one's ability, Brain thought in his head with a sneer. *Since I went through this much trouble, they'd better be worth it.* With each step, the smell of blood grew stronger, and finally, he spotted two shadows.

"You two seem to be having fun."

"Not at all, I think they were too weak. I can't fill my blood pool too well." It was a response that seemed completely unwary of Brain's sudden appearance, as if they already knew that he was coming. Brain didn't make any particular effort to conceal his presence either, so he wasn't surprised. He scowled slightly as he looked at the two intruders.

"They told me it was two women, but one of them is just a kid… And she's wearing a dress…?" He immediately tossed aside such thoughts. Floating above the girl whose beauty seemed to be without equal, was a sphere that looked as if it was made of blood. "First time I've seen that kind of magic… You're a magic caster?" A magic caster would have no need for armor, which would explain why these two would be wearing a dress in a place like this.

"A divine magic caster, believer of the bloodline of the origin, God Cainabel."

"Cainabel? First time hearing of a god by that name. Is he an evil god?"

"Yes, he belonged to that category. Well, he was defeated by the Supreme Beings anyways. According to them, he was a 'weak event boss'. "

Shifting his eyes away from the girl who was going on about some Supreme Beings and whatnot, Brain focused his attention on the woman standing like a servant. This one was also a beauty. Her buxom figure seemed to radiate sensuality. From the splotches of crimson covering her white

dress, she must have been the one who killed the guards. Brain simply shrugged his shoulders and grasped his katana.

"Well, that's not important. I'm ready to go whenever. If you can't say the same, I can wait. What'll you do?" Giving him a surprised look, the girl covered her mouth in order to stifle a faint laugh. "How brave of you, will you really be fine alone? You may call more of your friends, if you'd like."

"We both know that bringing together a bunch of third-rates won't work against you two. I will be enough."

"Are you one of those…? The type that doesn't understand how high the sky is? Do you think you can touch the stars simply by reaching for them? That type of naivety should be reserved for children like Aura. It's just disgusting with an adult."

"What wrong with adults like that? I guess a girl can't understand a man's romance?"

Brain drew his katana into a stance. Seeing this, the girl wore a bored expression and glanced towards the ceiling and spoke. "You can start now." The girl gestured with her chin, prompting the woman next to her to dash forward. Her movement was truly like the wind, but for Brain, even the speed of the wind was not fast enough. "Haah!" With a roar, Brain launched himself with all the strength in his body and struck like a storm. The slash held enough power to easily cleave an armored man in two.

"Kuh!"

"Tsk, too shallow." Stopped during the middle of her rush, the vampire gripped her shoulder and was forced to back away. The katana had entered through the collarbone and left a slash across her chest. Brain narrowed his eyes as he watched his opponent. Aside from the fact that he had failed to kill her with the first blow, there was another thing that he had trouble understanding. The wound on her shoulder should have been sprouting blood, but not a single drop could be seen.

Is it magic? While in thought, Brain's eyes squinted slightly when he saw the wound that her hand had been covering. The katana wound on her shoulder was slowly but surely, being healed. Although he had heard rumors of the existence of high speed healing magic, this seemed different. Then there was only one other answer. A monster with the ability to regenerate, the sharp canines sprouting from her mouth, crimson eyes filled with enmity, a human-like appearance… Brain, whose trail of thought had led up to this point, realized the monster's identity.

"A vampire… Huh. Its special abilities… High speed regeneration, charm, life drain, spawn vampire minions, resistance against weapons and cold… I think there was more… Whatever." He just had to cut them down. With that in mind, Brain firmly gripped his katana. The woman widened her eyes and her crimson pupils grew eerily large. At that moment, Brain's mind began to cloud over. The enemy in front of him started to seem more and more like an ally. However, with a quick shake of his head, the mist was gone.

"…A charm? My mind isn't so weak for it to be influenced by something of this level." Not only his weapon, even Brain's heart was like that of a katana. He was easily able to dispel simple charm spells. The vampire looked at him with hatred and bared her fangs, but it was a look born out of

fear. One who was confident in their own strength would have simply attacked. In other words, the vampire had become wary, whether it was because of his attack, or because of the realization that he was a formidable opponent.

"At least you're smart. But even a wild beast can tell that much." Brain shuffled his feet and inched towards the vampire. Matching his advance, his opponent slowly retreated backwards. How boring. Brain laughed mockingly, and as if taunted, the vampire stopped her retreat and advanced slightly.

The distance between the two was now three meters. For the vampire, it was a distance she could cover in a single leap. However, her wariness towards Brain's skill prevented her from stepping forward immediately. Then, a small smile formed on her lips, and the vampire extended her hand in front of her.

'Shock Wave'. The ground tore in its wake as the shockwave hurtled towards Brain. Easily able to crush full plate mail, for Brain, who was only wearing a chainmail, being hit by such a blast would leave him gravely injured. Not only that, the huge difference in physical abilities between the two meant that taking even a single hit would greatly turn the tide of battle against him. However, the vampire widened her eyes in surprise.

"Try celebrating after actually hitting your target. Your movements are too easy to read." He was untouched. Having easily dodged the invisible attack, Brain said with a smirk. The vampire wore a look of surprise and panic and jumped backwards with a large leap. She had realized that it was a mistake to underestimate this human as a lower life form. On the other hand, although he did not show it on his face, Brain knew he had to rethink his plan of attack. The thought that she could use magic had escaped him completely.

Brain's ultimate goal was Gazef, and their fight would be settled with their swords. Because of this, his skill in magic wasn't on par with his skill with the sword. Against such an opponent, he couldn't predict what she would do next. The result was a stalemate where both sides glared at each other, waiting for an opening to strike. Growing weary of the situation, the girl let out a sigh.

"Haa… Substitution." As the girl snapped her finger to interject, her dry voice caused the vampire to tremble uncontrollably. In front of his opponent who had completely lost her focus, Brain did not move. Even when given such an opening, he did not take the opportunity to attack. Instead, he shifted his attention to the girl and stared searchingly.

Her body was skinny and contrasted oddly with her swollen chest. Her arms looked frail enough for Brain to easily snap like a twig. There were many types of divine magic casters. Clerics were strong in close combat, while Priestesses and Bishops specialized in magic incantations. Since she asked to switch, she must be confident enough to fight without a guard. Then—

Brain's face broke into a smile. *She doesn't seem to be the type to fight with summons. Another vampire, then.* Judging by her behavior, this one must be a higher level than the other vampire. You can never judge a monster by their appearance. It wouldn't be strange for her to be even stronger than the one before, especially since she decided to step in after seeing how strong Brain was.

And the vampire's reaction earlier… Was it fear? *The master feared by its vampire servant… she's strong, someone I can't take lightly.* While keeping the girl in his sights, Brain furiously racked his

head trying to figure out her identity. *A vampire's master, is she a vampire lord similar to the ones from the legends? If I recall correctly, one of the more famous vampire lords was 'Landfall', who destroyed a kingdom… I heard it was killed by the thirteen heroes.* If the past heroes managed to do it, then it wasn't impossible.

Grasping his katana with renewed vigor, Brain readied his stance. "I am Brain Unglaus." Having stated his name to the strong opponent, what came back in response was a look of confusion. Feeling the awkwardness in the air, Brain asked her. "…Your name?"

"Oh! You're asking for my name? Cocytus would have stated his already, but I didn't see you as an opponent so I was slow to notice. Please forgive me. You should've just said so."

The girl grabbed the skirt of her dress, and, like asking a man for a dance at a ball, gave her greeting. "Shalltear Bloodfallen. Allow me to enjoy this." With a weapon pointed towards her, the girl gave a graceful bow. Did she think he wouldn't attack? Or maybe, was she confident enough to block his attack completely even if he did? The answer was clearly written in her expression, it was the latter. As if to say, you are not a threat.

I'll break that composure of yours. Brain glared at Shalltear with a look sharp enough to frighten even the most hardened warriors. Honestly, he didn't like her relaxed attitude, but a part of him welcomed it. The arrogance of the strong. It was one of the weapons humans could use to defeat monsters whose physical abilities were far above and beyond their own. In the past, Brain had multiple encounters with such creatures where he won by using this chance. Most of all, he could mock them after defeating them, teaching the fools that there were opponents in this world you shouldn't underestimate.

"Will you not be using martial arts?" Martial art. Over the course of a warrior's training, they push themselves to the limit and learn special skills that draw out all of their strength. Martial arts create unexplainable phenomena that are drawn from the warrior's own aura. It is the use of magic through weapons. Against an opponent vastly larger than yourself, 'Fortress' would allow one to shrug off powerful attacks and fight him head on.

By channeling your aura into your blade and releasing it in a powerful blast, 'Severing Blade' would allow one to take down strong opponents in a single attack. If the opponent was heavily armored, using 'Heavy Blow' with a crushing weapon would prove effective. Or, by simply strengthening yourself with 'Ability Boost', one could grasp victory with just their physical body.

Martial arts allowed one to prepare for many different situations, as such, warriors trained to learn various skills and master them in order to truly make them their own. This was especially true for adventurers, who faced dangers far above the norm. As for Brain—

"Hmph. I won't need it against someone like you." That was a lie. He wasn't stupid enough to reveal his hand before the battle. Brain slowly exhaled while lowering his body, and returned the katana to its sheath. His feet planted firmly. His breath; narrow and long. He focused his consciousness to a single point, and upon reaching its limit, released it in an enormous wave. He had created a world where he could sense sound, space and presence. It was the first of his original martial art, 'Field'.

A range of three meters, despite its short reach, it was a martial art that allowed one to instantly perceive everything in their surroundings. It would be easier to describe it as a skill that raised one's accuracy and evasion to the limit. When combined with Brain's trained body, this martial art became incredibly powerful. Even if a thousand arrows were to rain down on him, he was confident that he could instantly perceive and deflect the ones that would hit him, walking away without a scratch. What's more, his body was capable of movements precise enough to split a grain of wheat at a distance. And—

All life ends when their vitals are cut. That was all he needed. Instead of learning versatile skills, it was better to focus on just one aspect; a step faster than the opponent, a fatal attack that will always hit. Born from those ideals, was his second original martial art, 'Instant Slash'. Even after achieving a high-speed slash that was nigh impossible to avoid, he did not stop.

'Difficult' didn't even begin to describe his training. He practiced his 'Instant Slash' hundreds of thousands, no, millions of times, until the calluses on his hands hardened, until the katana's grip resembled the shape of his palms. In the endless pursuit of the limit, a new skill was born. A slash so fast that not even a drop of blood remains on the blade, 'God Slash', a skill he felt was bordering on the realm of the gods.

Once the blade left its sheath, it was impossible for the enemy to even see it coming. These two martial arts; an absolute awareness and a godlike slash, an unavoidable attack combining both 'Field' and 'God Slash' formed to create his trump card. The target to aim for was the vitals. Ideally, the neck. This was his Hidden Skill, 'Wind of the Great Forest'. It was named after the sound of blood sprouting shortly after severing the neck.

Even if the vampire didn't bleed, cutting off her head would secure his victory. "Are you ready now?" In front of Brain, in his imposing silence and sharp breathing, Shalltear merely shrugged her shoulders in boredom. "I'm going to assume you are and start attacking. If you have anything to say, now would be the time." After a brief moment—

"I'm going to crush you." With a joyful declaration, Shalltear stepped forward. *Keep talking while you can. Let's see if you can keep that composure after I separate your head from your body.* He didn't say it out loud, if he opened his mouth, it felt as if his concentration so far would be wasted. Shalltear, seemingly without a care in the world, approached him. She walked completely defenseless, as if she was going to a picnic.

Seeing his opponent so full of openings, Brain fought to keep the smirk off his face. Foolish, would be the only way to describe it. Nevertheless, he won't give her the chance. While activating 'Raise Stats', Brain waited for his adversary to enter his 'Field'. He concentrated everything to the moment when she would enter the range of his blade. These foolish monsters that think they're the strongest, they're all the same. They think that humans are weak, that our bodies are fragile, our abilities non-existent.

But I will teach you how dangerous it is to underestimate us. Brain swore in his heart. Martial arts were created so humans could fight enemies far beyond them. *I'll kill her with one attack.* The prouder they were, the more desperate they become once cornered. If he couldn't kill her with the first attack, she would no doubt order her servant to join the fight.

Then the situation would become two versus one, and even Brain couldn't be confident against those odds. That's why he had to settle it in one blow. His face unmoving, Brain silently ridiculed her. Approaching without care, she didn't understand that she was walking towards a guillotine. Just three more steps, two steps… one. And then—

Your head is mine! Thinking so in his head, Brain put everything into his slash. "Tsuu!" His breath was sharp and short. The katana exploded from its sheath and cut through the air towards Shalltear's bare neck. The speed was like a flash of lightning. So fast that by the time the light entered your vision, your head would already be falling to the ground. Millions of repetitions had finally resulted in a speed that entered the realm of gods. *I got her.* Brain was certain—

And couldn't help but widen his eyes. The slash that cut through the air had all of his strength behind it. If she had managed to dodge, then he would have been forced to admit that an opponent stronger than even his wildest imagination had finally appeared before him. However—

Shalltear had caught it with her fingers. A slash near the speed of light. And with a delicate motion like holding the wings of a butterfly… The air around him seemed to freeze. Brain exhaled a large breath.

"…I-Impossible." His voice carried barely a whisper. Brain forcefully held back his body that was threatening to tremble uncontrollably. He couldn't believe the sight in front of him. But without a doubt, resting on his outstretched blade were two fingers, both white as pearls, her thumb and index finger. Not only that, her wrist was bent at a 90 degrees angle while holding the flat side of the blade, instead of the sharp edge.

Rather than stopping it head on, she had caught up to the katana's speed and thus caught up to his 'God Slash' from behind. Although it looked as if she was holding it lightly, no matter how hard Brain pushed and pulled against her, the katana didn't budge. It felt as if the sword was chained to a boulder hundreds of times his size. Suddenly, the power exerted on the katana rose, causing Brain to almost lose his balance.

"Hmph. Cocytus has a few swords too, but it seems they're not even worth being wary about when there's this much of a difference between the wielders." Shalltear peered at the blade while drawing it closer to her face. Brain, who had no idea what she was talking about, felt the inside of his head turn white. It was the despair of having his entire way of life denied in front of him.

But it was thanks to his defeat in the past that he could stay standing. Similar to how a broken bone grows stronger after it's mended; his experience with defeat was what kept him strong. It was impossible, but he had no choice but to admit it. She had easily caught his light-speed slash. Brain looked pale. Shalltear was surprised to see him this way and frowned. She then sighed in disappointment.

"Do you understand now? I'm not an opponent you can beat without using martial arts. If you finally get it, shouldn't you start getting serious?" Hearing such cruel words, Brain unintentionally let a single word slip from his mouth. "Monster…" Shalltear gave an innocent smile, like a blooming flower. "That's right. You just figured it out? I am a cruel, composed, merciless and adorable monster." She released her grip on the blade and jumped back to her original position. It was probably accurate to a millimeter.

"Are you ready now?" Shalltear said with a playful smile. Hearing the same question as before, Brain flared up in anger. Just how much could she look down on someone? On the other hand, Brain shuddered as he realized that his opponent was strong enough to make a mockery of him, a human who had reached the highest pinnacle of strength.

Should I make a run for it? Brain always considered survival to be his number one priority. If it seemed like he couldn't win, the best plan was to retreat and live to fight another day. Even now, he believed that he still had room to grow stronger. That's why as long as he survived, the only thing he had to do was emerge as the winner in the end.

But even if he retreated now, the fundamental difference between their physical abilities was insurmountable. Careful not to make his plan obvious, Brain focused his attention on his new target. The enemy's legs; the plan was to cripple her mobility and flee with everything he had.

The idea was to attack where her defenses were weakest, the area where her hands had trouble reaching. Having decided his next attack, Brain trained his eyes on Shalltear's neck and returned his katana to its sheath. Once launched, he could accurately hit his 'God Slash' even with his eyes closed. Then the obvious plan would be to deceive the enemy with his eyes.

"…I'm going to crush you." Once again, Shalltear stepped forward with light steps. The first time, Brain had eagerly waited for her to enter his 'Field'. But this time was different. If possible, he didn't want her anywhere near him. How his heart had weakened. Realizing this, Brain furiously tried to reignite his spirit, to no avail. It was like the fire that burned inside him had run out of fuel. Left in such a state, he waited for Shalltear to enter while observing with his 'Field'.

Three steps, two steps, one step… She entered his range. While staring at his opponent's neck, Shalltear's face entered his vision… He only had one real target, her right ankle in mid-motion. He slightly dropped his katana, still in its sheath, all in an attempt to accelerate himself even a tiny bit faster. After breaking his concentration, he confirmed that the speed of this slash would be even faster than the previous one. If he himself were on the receiving end, he would not be able to defend against it.

This could work! Just barely visible beneath the edges of her skirt, as he was about to blow away the thin ankle that suited the girl so well, the katana slipped out from his hand. Having regained his senses, Brain had no idea what had happened just then. His 'Field' that blessed him with absolute awareness finally caught up and revealed the katana that rolled onto the ground, with the girl's heel pushing it into the dirt.

Impossible, but it was reality. The reason the katana had slipped from Brain's grip was due to the high heels' force that was transmitted through the blade. There was just one reason why he didn't want to believe. Even with his concentration raised to the utmost limit, even within the 'Field' that he was so proud of; Brain could not perceive the moment when she blocked the attack.

From a distance close enough to touch by simply reaching out a hand, Shalltear looked down at him with an icy gaze. Brain felt an incredible pressure that threatened to crush him into the earth. He was panting now. Sweat flowed profusely down his body, he felt an urge to vomit.

His mind grew dizzy as his vision twisted and turned. He had been in plenty of situations where he was pushed to his limit, they were commonplace. However, compared to now, they seemed

fake, like memories of a children's playground. The high heels released the blade, and Shalltear wordlessly jumped back.

"Are you ready now?"

"!" The third time hearing that voice, more than anything, he felt absolute despair. Expecting her next words to be the usual "I'm going to trample you now", what flowed into Brain's ears next was something different. "Is it possible… You can't use any martial arts?"

Hearing her sympathetic voice filled with pity, Brain inhaled sharply. He was at a loss for words. No, what could he possibly say in response? *That was it just now but you defeated it easily.* Could he sound any more like a clown? While biting down on his lips, Brain picked up his blade off the ground.

"…Were you not that strong, after all? I thought you would be stronger than the ones at the entrance… Oh, I'm sorry. It seems the lowest metric I can use to measure strength is a meter. The difference between one or two millimeter is just impossible for me to discern."

His unrelenting effort. His fight with Gazef was when he was confident in his own talent. The man who did not put in the effort lost to the man who did. Because of that, the failure engraved into his heart was channeled into a motivating force. That renewed earnestness he poured into his training was what defined his existence. Everything he was, this monster before him made a mockery of it.

I must seem pathetic. I, after all the monsters that I've killed, the arrogant fools who underestimated me just because they believed themselves to be stronger— While harbouring such thoughts, Brain forcibly suppressed his self-deprecation. Instead—

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!" With a scream, he charges at Shalltear with his sword raised high. Towards Shalltear, who had been looking at him with a peculiar expression, he swings down his katana with the weight of his entire body. A slash with the power of all of his muscles would have easily cleaved a human in two, even with the protection of a helmet. Against such a powerful attack, Shalltear stares at him with no intention to move.

This time for sure, he had her; such thoughts flashed through his head. But his thoughts were soon replaced by the surreal scene that occurred just before. *It'll be impossible for her to catch this so easi—* Immediately after, his worst fears were realized. A loud noise rang out, and once again, Brain was confronted with an impossible scene.

Shalltear's left pinky moved at an unbelievable speed, about two centimeters long, her fingernail had repelled his slash. What's more, her hand looked as if it wasn't even strained. Her fist was not fully clenched, and her pinky was gently bent against the blade. With a playful motion, she had stopped Brain's attack at full power. The attack that cut through armor, shattered swords and destroyed shields—

His spirit was tattered, threatened to shatter at a moment's notice. It took everything he had to keep himself together. His hand still shaking from the impact, he channels strength into his grip, raises his katana, and brings it down once more. And… Once more, it is casually blocked by Shalltear.

“Fuaaa~.”

A dramatic yawn, as if it was on purpose. Her free hand covered her mouth as if to stifle it. Her gaze now points to the ceiling. All traces of her regarding Brain as an opponent has vanished. Even so, even so, Brain’s katana was still deflected. By a left pinky.

“UUWWAAAAHHHHHHHH!!” A battle cry exploded from his throat. No, that wasn’t a battle cry, it was a wail. Lateral slash, deflected. Upper left diagonal slash, deflected. Vertical slash, deflected. Upper right diagonal slash, deflected. Rising slash, deflected. Reverse slash, deflected.

Every attack from every direction on every part of the body, all deflected. It was as if the katana was being drawn to her nail. In that moment, Brain finally understood. An existence that stood in a place reserved only for those possessing true, absolute strength. It was a place that no amount of god given talent or hard work could ever hope to approach, let alone fight.

“Ara? Are you tired? Well anyways, this nail clipper is awfully dull.” Hearing her words, he stopped his hands that were swinging the katana. Could one cut a mountain with a sword? Something like that was impossible. Any child would know something so obvious. Then, could one win against Shalltear? Any warrior who fought her would know the answer. Absolutely impossible.

A human could never beat an existence possessing power beyond human imagination. If, for example, someone could fight her head on, it would be a being that surpassed humans. Unfortunately, Brain was just a warrior considered to be one of the strongest only amongst humans. Yes. No matter how much effort one put in, being born a human meant that all of it only amounted to an infant swinging a stick.

“…I… All that effort…”

“Effort? What a meaningless word. I was created strong so such effort was unnecessary.” Brain couldn’t help but laugh at those words. All of his work had been useless. To think he had been so confident, so sure that he was a prodigy. His limbs felt heavy, as if they were tied down by shackles.

“…? Ahahahaha, why are you crying? Did something sad happen?” He knew Shalltear was saying something to him, but he couldn’t hear her. It was like she was speaking from a place very far away. The calluses on his hands formed from blisters on top of blisters, the countless practice swings with the steel rod, they were all meaningless.

The endless running while wearing heavy armor, the bare-handed fights against monsters that he narrowly won, all meaningless. The life he had led until now, everything was for naught. In front of true strength, Brain was no different from the weaklings he had looked down until now.

“I was a fool…”

“…Are you satisfied now? Will it be alright if I end this?” Shalltear smiled mischievously and approached him with her pinky raised. Seeing this, Brain let out a cry. It wasn’t the battle cry of a warrior that he showed before, but the sobbing of a child. Brain ran. With his back turned. He

knew the difference in their abilities, it was engraved in him. Shalltear would be able to catch him in an instant.

However, none of that was in his mind. No, he didn't even have the time to worry about such things. He simply, with his face stained in tears, bared his defenseless back and ran inside as fast as his legs could carry him. At this moment, Brain felt on his back the innocent voice of a girl whose breath smelled of blood. "And now a game of tag? You're putting in quite the effort, aren't you? Then I guess I should enjoy myself. Ahahahaha."

Part 3

Cold air blew into the large hall. It flew between the gaps in the barricade and brushed over the forty-two remaining members of the "Death Spreading Brigade". Because it was the largest room in the cave, the hall was usually used as the mess hall. However, presently, it had been transformed into a fort.

Located within the deepest part of cave that served as the mercenary's hideout, the sides of the long and narrow hall were lined with many rooms: living quarters and storage space for weapons and food supplies. Because of this, losing that area meant that the rest would be picked off one by one. In the case of an attack, they would build an encampment in the hall and use it as their last line of defence.

Despite calling it an encampment, the construction was mediocre at best. First, they placed crude tables on their sides, then stacked several wooden boxes to complete what could just barely pass as a blockade. Next, they stretched numerous ropes at around half a man's height between them and the entrance of the hall. Their purpose was to prevent the enemy from charging into the barricade. Just behind these defenses, almost every mercenary held a crossbow and stood ready. They were arranged at the center and at either flank.

Even if it came down to a firefight, considering the width of the entrance and the size of the hall, the side waiting in the hall held the definite advantage. If the enemy tried to change their formation, no matter where they attacked, they would still be assaulted from somewhere else. Even if they chose to use wide area attacks, the group was scattered out and it would prove difficult to inflict any significant damage. It was a formation making use of crossfire.

Despite being protected by such simple defenses that still allowed them to fight against larger forces, the men's faces were filled with unease. Sound of rattling metal rang out as bodies trembled against the chainmail wrapped around them. It was true that the temperature inside the cave wasn't that high; it was enough for summers to feel comfortable. But what seized them was something slightly different from a chill.

Just a short moment before, a loud laughter rang out from the entrance. It was a terrifying laughter that echoed against the walls of the cavern, rendering it indiscernible as to whether the voice belonged to a man or a woman. It was this voice that froze their insides cold. The strongest man of the 'Death Spreading Brigade', Brain Unglaus. Since he stepped out to fight, the mercenaries believed that forming a barricade was a meaningless endeavor.

That belief was completely blown away by the laughter. An enemy that could defeat Brain; someone like that didn't exist. Even now, they still believed it. Brain's strength was in a different

league. He was skilled to the point where even the Empire's knights were no match for him; monsters were no exception. He could kill an ogre in a single attack, and could jump into a pack of goblins and cut them down like grass. He was a man who could even defeat all the members of the 'Death Spreading Brigade' in a head-on clash.

They had no choice but to call such a person the strongest. A man of that caliber had lost; the implications were severe. The fact that the opponent had the leisure to laugh during a fight against Brain meant only one thing. Even when everyone understood, no one spoke. The best they could manage was to silently look at each other's faces. Every single member of the mercenaries had their mouths closed shut, and glared in the direction of the hall's entrance, the cave's entrance. In the midst of the mounting tension—

The sound of someone running could be heard; it slowly grew louder. One could hear the sound of someone swallowing their saliva. A silence dominated the hall, and was soon broken by the noise of numerous arrows being nocked to its position. A man completely out of breath ran through the hall's entrance, under watch by the entirety of the mercenary group. It was a wonder how the arrows didn't immediately fly in his direction.

"Brain!" The boss of the mercenaries, their leader, yelled aloud. Following shortly, the hall exploded in cheers. It was a roar of celebration for their victory against the intruders. Each man pounded the shoulder of the one next to him, and shouts praising Brain rang out in triumph. His name could be heard countless times.

Surrounded in cheers, Brain weakly held his weapon in one hand and stood at the entrance of the hall with a blank expression. He suddenly began to search the faces of the mercenaries around him. No, that was wrong, he was looking for something else. Seeing Brain act so differently from his usual self, the cheering in the room slowly died down. Brain ran towards the barricade.

"H, Hey! Just hold on! We're opening it right now!" As if he didn't hear a word, he squeezed his body through. Not wanting to wait even one minute, one second, Brain passed the barricade and ran. With the confused looks of the bandits following behind him, he threw open the door to a storage room and ran inside. "What was that about? Did he leave something in there?"

"Who knows? Something was strange about him though… He looked like he was crying… No way, right?" Their heads bent to the side, staring at the door that just closed shut; the mercenaries could not understand the meaning of the strange spectacle that just occurred before them. Amongst them, one man's face had changed. He understood the truth of the situation that only he, no, with Brain combined; only two at present had come to grasp. However, the man had no time to ascertain whether or not he was correct.

Click, with a quiet sound, another figure had emerged from the entrance. Needless to say, it was an unfamiliar face. If no one amongst the mercenaries knew who this person was, it meant that she was the intruder responsible for the chaos. The commotion in the hall dried up instantly. That was impossible, then Brain's appearance here would take on a completely different meaning. The fact that the intruder was alive meant that he had lost and fled.

There was only one intruder, with a hunched appearance that looked incredibly eerie. A small body, she looked like young girl. Her hands were hanging loosely at her sides, and her chin was bent all the way downwards. The strange part was that considering the position of her head

relative to the base of her neck, her neck looked as if it was at least three times as long as a normal person's.

With such an appearance, seemingly unconcerned that her long and shiny silver hair was dragging along the ground, she slowly entered the hall. Her fine, pitch-black dress gave her the appearance of being clad in darkness. No one said a word. An appearance so queer; a heart stopping chill.

Her head moved slowly. Behind the thin, silver hair that covered the entirety of her face, two crimson eyes lit up. And slowly narrowed like needles. Everyone present understood. No, they were forced to understand. She was laughing. The frightening girl raised her chin, revealing a graceful face. But to those who saw her appearance just before, there was nothing more disturbing. The face was too elegant; it looked like a mask carved by the hands of a first-rate artisan.

"Hello everyone. I am Shalltear Bloodfallen. Is this the finish line? Is the game over?" The girl who seemed to be spouting utter nonsense, Shalltear, scanned her surroundings. But unable to spot the one she was looking for, her beautiful face frowned. With no one looking to interrupt her, once more, the girl's voice rang through the hall.

"This time it's hide and seeeeeeeeeeek?" She laughed mischievously. As if she found something irresistibly hilarious, the girl looked down and continued to laugh, her hair covering her face. With their situation growing more abnormal by the second, the mercenaries inhaled a giant gulp of breath. All the while, Shalltear's laughter grew louder and louder.

"AhahaaaaahahahaAHAHAAAAAAAAHAHAHA!!" With her laugh continuing to ring out loud, she raised her head. The face that entered their vision caused the mercenaries to simultaneously feel as if their heart stopped and their blood froze over. There was no beauty to be found in that face. The color of her iris spilled forth and dyed the rest of her eyes in a deep crimson. Her teeth, which seemed so white and beautiful just a moment ago, were replaced with rows of narrow, needle-like fangs similar to the jaws of a shark. Her lips, which gave off a bewitching red glint, grew smoother, and a transparent glob of saliva trailed down from the corner of her mouth.

"AHAHAAAAAAAAAAHAHAHAAAAHAHAHA!" Shalltear's lips tore upwards to just below her ears, and let loose a laughter that sounded like the ringing of countless off-tune bells. The air in the hall sounded as if it was screaming. Even considering that they were inside a cave, the reverberation was frightening. It was as if the air itself couldn't endure the noise and was crying out in pain.

Girl? Monster? Beast? She was none of those. An avatar of terror. Even at this distance, her breath was so overpowering that the stench of blood was plenty apparent. It looked as if even the air around her was dyed red from the smell.

"Uuuuwaaaahhhhh!!" With a scream, a mercenary completely overwhelmed by terror pulled the trigger on his crossbow. The arrow sailed through the air and burrowed itself deeply into Shalltear's chest. Her body shook slightly from the impact—

"Fire!" Snapped awake by the voice of their leader, the rest of the mercenaries fired their crossbows with the feeling of wanting to reject their fear. The arrows fell with the sound of heavy rainfall and pierced Shalltear's body. Of the 40 shots fired, 31 of them found their mark. Every

single one that hit was lodged deeply into their target. It was an obvious outcome, considering that at this distance, the arrows could easily penetrate through iron armor. There were four arrows through the head, if it were a human, the wound would be fatal.

"We got it…" Someone muttered. It was the hope that was on the tongue of every mercenary present. Although she was still standing, the arrows that covered her body made her look like a porcupine. Realistically, she was definitely dead. Although it made sense in their head, a thorn named terror was still lodged deeply in a corner of their heart. The mercenaries, as if urged by some hidden beasts' survival instinct, started to nock another arrow into their crossbows.

And… Shalltear moved. With an exaggerated movement, like a conductor moving his conducting rod, she slowly stretched out her two arms. All the arrows that were deeply rooted in her body slowly began to be pushed out and fell to the floor. Not a drop of blood could be seen on any of them. The arrowheads seemed untouched, as if they were never fired in the first place.

Shalltear laughed. The smile that rose to her face could truly be called foul. The fear took them, their screams erupted in every direction as once again, countless arrows headed towards Shalltear's direction. Through the eyes, the neck, buried in the stomach, lodged in the shoulder. Even in that hailstorm, she treated it like a minor annoyance, a drizzle of rain.

"Thaaaaaaaat wooooonnnn't wooooorrrrk. You're trying tooo haaaaaarrrrrrrd." A step. Then… A leap. The distance to the ceiling was about five meters. A jump high enough to touch the top, easily clearing the barricade and landing on the opposite side. Her heels touched the ground with a click, and the arrows that littered her body all clattered to the floor. She turns her face around towards the mercenaries still reloading behind her. And with one foot forward… Strikes.

A blow without any of her weight behind it, it was a simple punch that looked as if she was merely placing her hand forward. But the speed and destructive power of that punch was in a league of its own. Her fist easily passed through a lone mercenary and crashed into the barricade. With an exploding noise, the wood splintered and was crushed, sending chunks of the barricade scattering everywhere.

A heavy curtain of silence filled the hall. The only noise that could be heard was from the pieces of wood falling to the ground. The mercenaries stood staring absentmindedly at Shalltear, their hands no longer busy trying to reload.

Shalltear proceeded to stick her index finger into the blood orb that floated above her head. As she slowly withdrew her finger, a string of blood trailed behind it and drew a character in front of her. Similar to Sanskrit or runes, it had formed a magic character. It was a skill called 'Blood Pool' from one of Shalltear's classes, Blood Drinker. By storing blood drawn from fallen enemies, it allowed the user to create a ball of magical energy that could later be used for other purposes.

Also, by drawing its power, one could use magic augmentation skills without spending mana. 'Penetration Magic: Implosion'. 10th tier magic, as the strongest tier of magic flew out, the bodies of ten mercenaries suddenly became bloated. They didn't even have the chance to scream. As they looked down at themselves in confusion, a face filled with terror was all that was allowed of them. The next moment a light noise like that of popping balloons could be heard as their bodies exploded.

“Ahahaaaaahahaahahaha! Splaaaaaaaat! It’s sooooo prrreeeeeeeeeeettttty—!” Shalltear motioned towards the bloody mist and laughed happily while clapping her hands. “Uwaaaahhhh!” With a cry, an estoc flew out and stabbed Shalltear’s chest from the back, through where her heart was. It twisted and turned, trying to widen the wound. “Die!” Following suit, a broadsword cleaved halfway through her head and became lodged around her left eye.

“Keep attacking, you guys!” A mixture of screams and roars, their battle cry exploded as three mercenaries brought their weapons down on Shalltear. Again and again, their swords slashed through her. However, with the broadsword still stuck in her face, Shalltear stood calmly. As if their attacks didn’t even itch, let alone actually hurt. She wore a smile that only served to infuriate them further.

After countless attacks, the exhausted mercenaries released their grip on their weapons; with a cry of lament, they showered her with punches and kicks. Despite their difference in size, like a huge boulder, Shalltear stood unmoving. Shalltear tilted her head and stared at her attackers, deep in thought. Then, as if she just thought of something good, clapped her hands together.

“Haaaaauuuuaaaaa.” As if releasing all of the heat inside her, she let out a massive breath. The stomach-churning stench of blood filled the surroundings. Shalltear lazily pulled the broadsword out of her head. Needless to say, it didn’t even leave a scratch. As she was about to swing the sword, Shalltear’s hand stopped in mid-air.

The blade in her hand was gradually crumbling to pieces. In her mind that was hungry for blood, she remembered one of her class, Cursed Knight’s penalties. She tossed the weapon aside in disappointment and lazily swiped with her hand. Three heads rolled onto the floor.

“R, Run away! Quickly! Retreat!”

“You can’t kill a monster like that!” Crying out in unison, the mercenaries began to flee. One of them, who had lost all will to fight, felt Shalltear’s hand close around the back of his head. *Crack, squish*, with a sound similar to forcefully prying open a shellfish, pieces of his brain flew in every direction as his head exploded.

“Ahahahaaahaha. What’s wrong with his heeeaaaaaaad? How scaaaaaaarrrry! Ahahahahaaaahaha! Wait for me, eveeeeryoooone! Ahahahaaaahahahaaaaaa!” The mercenaries, overcome with curiosity by the bizarre sound behind them, were greeted with this gruesome spectacle. Like something straight out of a nightmare, the laughing, bloodthirsty queen ran towards them with the determination to not let even one of them escape. A mercenary who stumbled and tripped over his own feet while trying to run fell to his knees in prostration.

“D, Don’t kill me! Please! I won’t do bad things anymore!” Seeing the man, his face stained with tears, grabbing desperately onto her leg and begging for his life, Shalltear’s face formed an evil smile that looked like a crack. The mercenary instantly realized what her smile meant, and his already pale face became dyed completely in white.

“Whooooooooossssssssh fllyyy!”

“NO! NOOOOOO!!” Shalltear grabbed the man, who was still desperately clinging to her leg, on his back and lightly flung him towards the ceiling. Unable to resist the overwhelming strength that

pulled at him, the mercenary was forced to let go. He clenched his eyes shut as he was wrapped by a momentary feeling of weightlessness. Soon enough, gravity took him back and pain shot through his arms as they dashed against the floor.

"Ughh!" The pain was proof that he was still alive. A moment of relief, the mercenary slightly opened his eyes and soon understood that it was a false hope. With her skinny arms, Shalltear had gently caught him before the rest of his body could crash onto the floor. He still hadn't escaped from the clutches of this terrible monster. No, not only that, his eyes showed a huge, gaping mouth. A stench he had never experienced before, like a condensed mass of blood, stabbed his nose.

"Ahahahahahaaaaha, soooooooo fuuuuuuuun. Did you think you could die so eaaaasiiiilly? "D, Don't kill—"

"Noooooooo waaaaaaay, it's been so long since I've sluuuuurrrpeeed someone uuuuup." Her mouth tore open up to her ears, it was wide enough to swallow a man's head whole. No one at that place had any idea. Originally from the DMMO known as Yggdrasil, the monster known as the True Vampire was a terrifying existence. Their gaping jaws stretch wide enough to form a semicircle, their canines reach past their chin, and their crimson eyes glint with the color of blood.

Their feet and hands are equipped with razor sharp claws that are over a dozen centimeters long. From the eerie way they move, to how they leap at their target when attacking, the True Vampire was of such an appearance. A normal vampire was a monster that was both human and bat, and an Origin Vampire had an appearance that was even more monstrous.

Amongst the different vampire classes, the only monsters that could be described as beautiful would be Shalltear's servants, the vampire brides. The reason Shalltear herself, who was a True Vampire, had a beautiful appearance was simply due to the illustration and 3D modelling skills of the guild member who designed her.

The present Shalltear was the real appearance of a True Vampire. In other words, her usual form was a lie. Like a rubber toy, like an ugly, large leech, Shalltear wrapped her mouth around the man's neck. With the feeling of countless needles digging into his flesh, the mercenary heard the disgusting sound of huge amounts of blood being sucked from his body. A chill permeated through him and he felt his fluids being sucked away. It was a frightening feeling that he had never before experienced.

Although the mercenary wanted to thrash about, his limbs grew heavy. He could feel his consciousness rapidly slip away. Having completely sucked all the blood from the body, Shalltear tossed aside the now dried-up husk and licked the blood trailing from a corner of her mouth with a long, slippery tongue. Seeing the mercenaries who were now running in complete chaos, she broke out into a smile that spanned her entire face.

"There's sttiiiilll this many leeeeeeeeffffft?" Countless screams, like cries of children, wails of despair tore through the cavern. Surrounded by the stillness that now blanketed the hall, Shalltear wore a gleeful expression. The blood orb that hovered above her was now only slightly smaller than a human head. It had grown from the vast amount of blood it had absorbed.

“This is soooooooo muuuuuuuccccccccch fuuuuuuuuuun!” Hearing Shalltear’s jubilant shout, the vampire bride who had been blocking the entrance bowed her head and responded. “Seeing you happy fills me with joy as well, great master.”

“Maaaaaiiiiiiiiin diiiiiiiiissssh!” Shalltear headed for the door that Brain had disappeared into, and forcefully yanked it open. The bolts popped out, and the door was ripped off along with its hinges. The room was small, but filled with numerous sacks and wooden boxes. There, Shalltear smelled something completely unexpected. Mixed with the scent of dirt, the smell of fresh air, it was coming from the outside wind. At the same time, she felt the presence of the human weaken. Even when she had lost herself in her Blood Frenzy, Shalltear had never once forgotten the mission that was entrusted to her.

“KUUUUUAAAAAAAAAAAA!” Whether it was from anger or a simple howl, Shalltear screamed in a bizarre voice as she headed to the source of the breeze, flinging aside the junk blocking her way. Less than a meter away, behind a stack of boxes, was a hole. Although it was mostly covered with dirt, there was a small crack where the fresh air flowed freely through.

“Theeeeey haaaad an emeeergency exxiiitt!” The lesser vampire did not lie; it merely did not know about the existence of this hidden exit. What most do not know is that even when under the influence of magic, one cannot reveal information that he didn’t know in the first place. If the person was told a lie but believed it to be the truth, he would be spreading false information when prompted.

Unlike Mare, Shalltear did not have any abilities that allowed her to move the earth. Blowing it away with a shockwave carried the risk of the hole collapsing on itself. He had gotten away. The truth dawned on her. Shalltear, whose mind was dyed red, soon realized that she had failed her mission. Fury twisted Shalltear’s face.

Why, why didn’t this human insect move according to her, Shalltear Bloodfallen, Nazarick’s Floor Guardian’s predictions? She was going to let him give his worthless life for the good of Nazarick, why didn’t he understand and be happy about that? As Shalltear was grinding her teeth, the vampire bride who was supposed to stand watch outside the cave spoke to her.

“Shalltear-sama!” Her temper flared at the servant that dared to abandon her watch without orders. Shalltear’s vision became momentarily dyed in red as she considered destroying her on the spot. With great effort, she calmed herself; it was important to hear what the vampire bride had to say, it may be important.

“Whaaaaaat iiisss iiittt?”

“A large group is heading this way.”

“Huuuuuuhh? Suuurrviiivooorrs? Thhheeeeen weeeee haaaavvvve to greeeeeet thheeem! Ahaha ahaha ahahaha!”

Part 4

Shalltear leapt forward. Like a bird flying through the dark, she landed on one foot on top of the barricade at the entrance of the cavern. Her servants, the two vampire brides, were slowly

following her back up the entrance. Shalltear wore a smile as she looked at the target. She spotted a tightly formed group.

Leading the front were three men who looked to be warriors. Each of their equipment was different, but even the shabbiest looking one out of the bunch was wearing armor forged by overlapping many scales together, scale armor. Each man held a weapon in one hand and was carrying a shield on his back.

Behind them was a red-haired female warrior wearing banded armor. At the back of the group, protected by those in front, walked a lightly-dressed man holding a staff; most likely a magic caster. Beside him, walking side-by-side was a divine magic caster wearing a bishop's garb over his armor. The man wore a pendant around his neck in the shape of a flame. The group of six, despite being surprised by Shalltear's sudden appearance from the cave, did not fall into confusion and maintained their guard. It was a reaction born from their experience.

"Nooooott baaaaaaadd." It wasn't too bad to kill humans that were as weak as tofu, but having opponents that looked like they could actually put up a fight was much more interesting. Shalltear smiled eagerly as her two crimson eyes glinted with expectation.

"It talke…!" A look of shock flashed across the magic chanter's face, but it was only for an instant. Having immediately regained his composure, "Hostile might be a vampire! Only silver and magic weapons are effective. Victory impossible! Retreat! Don't look into its eyes!"

He shouted in a voice loud enough to be heard in the whole basin. Having shouted only the important information, the response from the rest of the party was both prompt and swift. The three warriors at the front equipped their large shields and assumed a defensive stance. They did not stare at Shalltear's face, instead trained their eyes on either her chest or abdomen. The female warrior behind them took each of their weapons and began to apply a coating. An unpleasant stench wafted to Shalltear's nose.

Alchemical silver. A special liniment crafted by alchemists; when coated on weapons, it forms a magical film around the blade that gives it an effect similar to silver. A silver weapon was expensive. Not only that, they wore out much faster than weapons made of iron and couldn't be used for very long.

That's why most adventurers choose to buy the alchemical silver instead, to use it when the need arises. With their weapons now imbued with the properties of silver, the group began their retreat. Even the way they fled was very impressive. The entire group moved as one, their movements orderly and in sync.

"My Lord, God of Flames—"

"It's pointless! Focus on defensive magic!" Having stopped the Bishop from using his pendant, the magic caster began to focus his casting to the front of the group. The Bishop also followed suit and restarted his chant. Although it differs by class, in general, Bishops use the power of God to suppress, destroy, and dominate beings like angels and demons.

However, it was a method only effective against enemies whose magical energy was much lower than the caster's. In other words, the bishop had attempted to cast a spell to suppress undead just

now. The magic caster had instantly understood the strength difference between the monster and the bishop, and told him to not waste his energy and use it for something more effective instead.

Having deduced their leader from the flow within the group, Shalltear decided to follow her orders and capture them. But her heart was still clouded by the impulse to slaughter, to see more blood. She wanted to kill, to crush them beneath her feet, to tear them limb from limb, to cover them in blood. She couldn't bear it. Her breathing grew ragged and started to foam at the mouth.

'Anti-Evil Protection'. 'Lesser Mind Protection'. One by one, the two magic casters cast their defensive spells on the warriors at the front. Shalltear, who was lost in her excitement, albeit dimly, felt something akin to admiration. Even if it was of the most basic, the 1st tier, the spells they used were the most appropriate for the situation.

They were different from the mercenaries with their reckless attacks, from the fool of a warrior who couldn't even use martial skills and attacked alone. With that said… A pointless endeavor is, in the end, just that; pointless. Against such a huge difference in strength, none of it had any meaning. Faced with such a cute resistance, the tiny sliver of self-control that kept Shalltear at bay was cut.

"No more… I caaaaaannnnn't! I caaaannnn't waaaaiiiit anymooorrrrre!" With a voice that had its reins cut, Shalltear moved her feet. It was truly light, like a single step. But to those who saw her, it would seem faster than a gale. Just like that, her hand stabbed forward. It penetrated the shield, shattered the armor, ignored the magical barrier, and cleaved through the skin, flesh, and bone; the hand wrapped around the beating heart and in an instant ripped it free.

Ignoring the crumpling figure of the warrior, Shalltear bared the dark red, shape shifting lump in her hand for the group to see. The female warrior let out a small scream, and the bishop's face looked as if he was staring at an abomination. Glad to have gotten the reaction she wanted, Shalltear giggled in excitement and cast her magic.

'Animate Dead'. The warrior who had lost his heart slowly stood back up. He had become a zombie, the lowest tier undead monster. However, it didn't end there. Shalltear licked the heart in her hand and stuffed it into the orb floating above her head. When she pulled it back out, in its place was a pulsating mass of blood, it was as if it was mimicking the appearance of the heart from before. She threw the blood clump at the zombie.

Like an insect, the clump twisted and turned, seeping into the zombie's body. *Thump.* For an instant, the body trembled. After several convulsions, the zombie slowly began to transform. As if all the moisture in its body had evaporated, the skin grew dry and cracked. Its nails grew several fold, and sharp canines formed from its teeth. The undead that stood there was no longer a zombie. Witnessing the birth of a lesser vampire, the shocked voices of the adventurers cried out in unison.

"That's impossible! I've never even heard of a vampire that can freely cast high level magic like that!"

"You're looking at one right now! Calm down! Keep a cool head!"

"But—"

“Retreat is impossible! We have to fight!”

“Got it!” As the bishop fell into disarray, one of the warriors raised his weapon and charged at Shalltear. The remaining warrior attacked the lesser vampire, who had been his ally in the past.

“My Lord, God of Flames. Destroy the foul being before you!” An invisible divine power radiated from the bishop’s pendant in every direction. Needless to say, Shalltear was completely unaffected. “Ahahahaaahaahaha!”

One of the warrior’s swords stabbed through the lesser vampire. Its movements had been dulled by the bishop’s divine energy. Because it hadn’t transformed completely, it was still part zombie and thus the bishop’s attack proved effective. Despite knowing this, the fact that her creature lost to some trivial god’s power was enough to offend Shalltear. While blocking the sword that came at her with her pinky, Shalltear glared annoyingly at the bishop who stood at the rear of the group.

“Baaaaaacccccck ooooooooffff!” She lazily flicked her right hand. The simple motion slashed the warrior’s neck and he fell to the ground, blood spilling from the wound. “「Lesser Strength Increase」.” A powerful spell was cast on the last remaining warrior. A lesser vampire with its movements dulled against a warrior buffed by strong magic.

The tide of battle between them was now slightly shifting in favor of the warrior. *Well, they seem to be enjoying themselves so it’d be rude to interrupt. There’s still plenty left to hunt after all.* With her blood thirst still running rampant, Shalltear thought so in her head and turned to stare at the bishop.

As if to block her line of sight, the female warrior stood in her way, with an iron weapon, nonetheless. It was almost cute, in a way. Even when obviously terrified, her determined appearance as she held her sword, it was like the pitiful resistance of a small animal. Shalltear felt her lower abdomen grow hot as she became enraptured in the pleasures of the flesh.

What sounds will she make if I bite off her fingers? I should cut off her ears and feed them to her. No, before doing anything, I’ll drink her blood. It’s the first female prey since I’ve ventured outside, after all. “Dessssseeeerrrrt, fooouuuunnnd.” After proclaiming so with her mouth wide open, she jumped. Shalltear easily leaped over the woman, and landed directly in front of the bishop and magic caster.

Before the bishop could even move, Shalltear gently wrapped her hand over his that was grasping the pendant and instantly crushed it. Flattened by the overwhelming grip, the bones in his hand shattered completely. With nowhere left to go, his skin and flesh burst from Shalltear’s palm. “GAAAAAAAAHHH!!” Satisfied with the bishop’s screams, Shalltear kindly gave him a gift; she freed him from his pain.

With a swing of her hand, blood sprouted from the bishop’s headless neck. The girl nodded happily as she watched the blood being absorbed into the orb above her head. Suddenly, a sword interrupted the scene, penetrating through Shalltear from behind. But like a giant tree, she did not budge. It was as if the blade sticking out from her chest was just a trivial inconvenience.

“No way… It’s not working! Even though this is silver?!” Seeing Shalltear unfazed by the blade that had clearly passed through her chest, right through the heart, the woman shrieked. Just a

minute ago, the female warrior didn't have a silver weapon. She must have picked up the dead warrior's weapon instead.

The information that the magic caster shouted wasn't wrong, however, it wasn't completely correct either. A silver weapon by itself was useless against Shalltear. On top of being forged with silver, it would have to be infused with powerful magic, or made of special metals. Ignoring the woman behind her, Shalltear stared at the magic caster who was still in shock. His mouth moved quickly.

"「Magic Arrow」!" As the magic was cast, two arrows of light hurtled towards Shalltear and, vanished in an instant. Shalltear's skill 'Magic Nullification' had activated. It wasn't perfect, and could be suppressed by those with more powerful magic. But with this much difference in power, the spell was easily nullified. In other words, what it meant was that the magic caster didn't have a single way to fight against Shalltear.

"Boorrrrrriiiiiiiiinnngg!" Having lost interest, Shalltear swung her hand and instantly cut off his head. Turning around, the lesser vampire and the warrior were still locked in a heated battle. Shalltear reached her hands towards the two heads on the ground. Grabbing both by the hair, she wore a bored expression as she threw them at both combatants. A mass weighing at least six kilograms, thrown at a frightening speed, the result was obvious. Both of them slowly crumpled to the floor.

All the while Shalltear was ignoring her, the dessert, the female warrior was relentlessly slashing and stabbing at Shalltear's body. But it was useless. Against Shalltear, who didn't even feel ticklish, let alone pain from her attacks, it was a meaningless action. The only thing it was doing was filling her dress with holes. But even that, since her clothes were of magic quality, would be repaired as long as Shalltear herself was fine.

"Theeeeeeenn! Deeessseeerrrt! Time to eaaaat!" A laugh like a child who saved her favorite food for last. Even so, it was a gross, evil sound. Shalltear turned to the woman attacking her back and met her gaze. As her vision met with Shalltear's crimson eyes, the female warrior realized that she was the last one left. With tears glistening in her eyes, she retreated a step, then another.

Then, she fervently searched around her belt pouch, looking for something. Her world now dyed in red, Shalltear stared at her struggle with a relaxed expression. She felt a tiny curiosity over what the woman was trying to do. She quickly pulled out a bottle and threw it. Shalltear peered at the bottle that was spinning mid-air in her direction and grinned.

Although the woman had thrown it with all her might, in Shalltear's eyes, it was too slow. It was easy to dodge. However, the arrogance of the strong did not allow it. And equally so, Shalltear wanted to see it; the expression on the woman's face as her last, secret weapon was destroyed. The desire to kill was overwhelming. But Shalltear held herself back. The longer she waited, the greater the bliss will be when she finally has a taste. As Shalltear watched the bottle hurtle towards her, she thought absentmindedly.

Holy water? Or is it liquid fire? Whatever it is, it's useless. Such a pitiful resistance. As I thought, I'll slowly drink her blood first, just enough so she doesn't die. If she's a virgin, it'll be fine if I drink till she's dead. If not, I'll play around with her a bit, preferably without spilling her blood.

Having decided, Shalltear lazily knocked the bottle aside with one hand. The impact caused the red liquid to escape from the mouth of the bottle, spilling onto her skin.

And then, a slight pain. The inside of Shalltear's head instantly turned white. The previous blood thirst that thrashed violently within her body was nowhere to be found. She blankly stared at the source of the pain; the hand that blocked the bottle. From where the liquid had touched her, a strong smell leaked out, along with a faint smoke.

Shalltear shifted her gaze down to the ground. The bottle was laid on the ground with its cap open, releasing an aromatic fragrance. It was a smell that she knew well. It was a potion bottle commonly used in the Great Tomb of Nazarick. The actual liquid itself was most likely a Minor Healing Potion. Undead are damaged by restoration items. It was the reason why Shalltear's skin was slightly melted.

"Impossible!!" An angry voice that seemed to shake the very air. "Bring that woman to me alive!" In response to her command, the vampire brides that had been standing aside until now moved. While Shalltear was lost in her thoughts, the woman had used the opportunity to turn and flee. The two vampire brides quickly closed the distance and grabbed her arms from both sides. Although the woman struggled violently, the difference in strength between a human and a vampire was too different. Too easily, she was dragged in front of Shalltear.

"Look into my eyes!" Shalltear grabbed the woman's chin and forcibly brought her eyes to bear on her own. Needless to say, she kept her strength in check, otherwise she would've accidently ripped her chin off and ended up in an embarrassing situation. Although Shalltear knew how to use divine magic, as an undead, she couldn't use the normal healing spells. Forced to look, the woman's eyes soon clouded over, and the terrified look on her face was replaced with a friendly expression. It was the charming effect of the 'Demon Eyes of Attraction'.

Sensing that she was well under her spell, Shalltear released the female warrior from her grip. She had several questions to ask her. But there was only one that needed to be asked before anything else. Shalltear picked up the potion bottle that fell to the ground and held it in front of the female warrior.

"Where did you get this potion? From who, where!"

"At a tavern, a man in black armor gave it to me." Hearing the words that were spoken as if they weren't that important, Shalltear's whole body froze solid. "…Wait… No, that's impossible… But… Which… Which city was it?"

"It was a tavern in E-Rantel." Shalltear was shocked, as if the world was shaking. The man in black armor; it was because she had a feeling that she knew who the female warrior was talking about. If that was the case, the bigger problem was, for what reason was this woman in possession of the potion. It was difficult to imagine that he would give it to her without reason.

"No way…" Did he also give this woman some unknown instructions? Or perhaps he gave her the potion to form a connection, or maybe to strengthen their friendship. The dignified appearance of Ainz Ooal Gown, the absolute ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, appeared in her mind. The possibility that she had ruined some kind of plan that he had devised burned at her heart.

“Why did you come here?! What’s your objective!” She no longer had the luxury of feigning delicacy with her words. Now that learning as much information as possible became the first priority, Shalltear glared at the woman with bloodshot eyes, with an entirely different feeling from before. “Yes. Our main task was to patrol the roads. But when we heard information that a bandit hideout was somewhere nearby, we came to investigate. It looked as if something happened, so we split into two teams and came here on a reconnaissance mission.”

“You split your team in two?”

“Yes. Since we didn’t know how many bandits there were, our job was to gather their attention and lure them to a trap that was being prepared by the others.”

“So there’s another team.”

Thinking that another annoyance had popped up, Shalltear clicked her tongue. “So, how many of you are there in total?”

“With me included, those that came here number seven, and—”

“What? Wait, seven? Not six?” Shalltear’s gaze moved towards the corpses on the ground. Three warriors, one bishop, one magic caster and this woman; the numbers didn’t add up. Against the eyes filled to the brim with questions, the female warrior responded nonchalantly.

“Yes. In case of an emergency, we had a ranger who would travel to E-Rantel for reinforcements.”

“What…?” The magic caster’s voice from before was oddly loud. That’s right, loud enough so the whole basin could hear. “Kuh!” Shalltear’s eyes widened as she jumped out of the basin with a speed faster than the wind. Although she had climbed all the way to the top and scanned her surroundings, even her eyes that could see in the dark could not see past the trees. Even when she focused her ears, the only sound that she could hear was the rustling of vegetation caused by the wind. Shalltear did not possess skills for detection or magic for searching. In the current situation, finding a human in this forest was impossible.

“Damn it!” She shouted in anger. She lost them. Honestly, she had been too complacent. With this it made two. She grinded her teeth. “Come, my kin!” Beneath Shalltear’s feet, her shadow squirmed, and several wolves protruded forth. Needless to say, these were not normal wolves. Their dark fur was as black as the night, and their red eyes glinted with a cruel cunning. 7th tier monster, Vampire Wolf. Although Shalltear could summon numerous monsters with her skill, ‘Raise Kin’, only these wolves could track their enemy.

“Follow him. Kill every human in this forest!” A roar like command, the ten vampire wolves ran in concert into the forest. Even as she watched them from the back, she felt that the chances of them succeeding were low. An image of Aura floated in her mind. While probably not at her level, a ranger would probably have a few tricks up his sleeve when it came to covering his tracks. In other words, it was necessary to assume that he had gotten away and to think of the next move. Shalltear rushed back to her original spot and questioned the female warrior, as if she was going to attack her.

“First, is there anyone besides you who received a potion from the one in black armor?”

“No, there aren’t any.”

“Okay! Then next question. Is there a chance that the ranger will re-join the remaining team?”

“None. In a situation where our team faced a good chance of being annihilated, his job was to abandon the team and return to the city. This was the path with the highest chance of our survival.” It was a preparation that accounted for both the possibility of defeat and their surroundings. Because of this, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Shalltear had been driven to a corner.

Realizing this, she flared in anger. “Puny humans, always having so many cunning tricks… If I ever get the permission to subjugate your kind, I’ll make sure that you’re treated like the maggots that you all are!” Lashing out in anger did not change the reality of the current situation. It was almost certain that the existence of a vampire would be delivered to the city. It was unknown whether or not the ranger was able to see what she looked like. It was the middle of the night, in the corner of the basin nonetheless. It was difficult to imagine that a human’s eyesight would have been able to perceive her appearance under such conditions. Even so—

“Damn it!” Shouting curses, Shalltear fell into thought. Her orders from Ainz — ‘Your targets this time are criminals. The type that would not inconvenience anyone even if they were to disappear. If any of the bandits you come across are able to use martial skills or magic, you must capture them at all costs, even if you have to suck their blood and enslave them. If you find any criminals who are knowledgeable about the world’s affairs or wars, they too, you must capture. Also, do not cause a scene. If the movements of Nazarick are made known, there is a possibility that it will interfere with our plans in the future.’ — were such.

Then she had already gone against most of her directives. Shalltear suppressed the mounting desire to claw out her hair. “Still, okay. Still, okay. Still, okay.” She repeated those words, as if she was trying to hypnotize herself.

Even if the information about a vampire spread to the city, it wasn’t as if her name or anything regarding Nazarick was included. In other words, there was nothing to connect the vampire that attacked this place with Nazarick. The people in the city will presume that the mercenaries at this hideout were slaughtered by a wild vampire, if such a thing even existed.

Regardless, the story had its fair share of holes, but it was impossible to make any further assumptions without more information. Once again, Shalltear fell into a whirlwind of thoughts. The next problem was, with her assumptions as the premise, how to deal with this woman. Even if she was charmed, her memory would not disappear completely. The safest option would be to kill her. The problem with that method was that she did not know her master’s intentions as to why he gave the woman the potion.

If he gave it to her with some objective in mind, then killing her here would create a problem for her master. That was very dangerous. If she let her return alive, the others will question why she was the only one spared. Then, all kinds of information, especially Shalltear’s appearance, would be revealed. While that may not pose too big of a problem at the moment, there was no telling what would happen in the future. The best way was to contact the master, but Shalltear did not know how to use the ‘Message’ spell. Then what was she supposed to do now—

“Ahhhhh… I’m going to be scolded by Ainz-sama…” Muttering in a voice small enough so that no one could hear, Shalltear wrapped her hands around her head. “If only I didn’t have Blood Frenzy… No, that’s rude to my creator, Peroroncino-sama. If only I could suppress it…” It was already too late for regrets. No matter how she dealt with the female warrior, it didn’t matter now, a scolding was inevitable.

The only thing left was to decide which way would best mitigate the damage. ‘Worse’ rather than ‘worst’. Shalltear thought about it over and over until smoke rose out of her head, and she made her decision. Instead of killing her, sparing her would create more options. Killing her was irreversible, but if she let her go, then something could be done about it. Shalltear decided so. No, it wouldn’t be wrong to say that she was fooling herself.

“Your name?”

“It’s Britta.”

“Okay… I won’t forget it!” Shalltear had the woman named Britta stand a bit further away. She then called over her two servants, the vampire brides. “We are going to collect everything here and withdraw.” She was worried whether there was enough time to pillage. Nevertheless, she had to bet on fooling the others into thinking that this was an attack to steal the loot. Since she had already failed, the least she could do was try to spread false information.

“Shalltear-sama, how shall the women be dealt with?” Shalltear fixed her gaze on the woman who was standing a small distance away. “Leave her like that.”

“No, I mean the other women.”

“…What? What other women?”

“Yes, Shalltear-sama. We searched the inside of the cave for survivors and found several women who looked to have been used to relieve their lust. How would you like them dealt with?”

Shalltear frowned. What the heck. Shalltear, turned and looked again. Since they didn’t see my face, it wouldn’t matter even if I let them be. But was that the correct course of action? It’s annoying so should I just kill them? No, then it would be suspicious that I didn’t kill Britta as well. Unable to decide which way was the most advantageous, Shalltear held her head.

“What should we—”

“Haaaaa? How should I know!” Why did you have to ask me something like that, you fool. Her face said as much. If she didn’t know, she could claim ignorance if it came down to it. But willfully ignoring it after having been told was clear treason against her master. “Enough already, I don’t know! I don’t know! Leave them here! Stick Britta with those women!”

“Is this okay?”

“Okay or whatever, I don’t know, damn it! Shut up for a minute!”

“I am sorry, Shalltear-sama.”

"We're leaving! Move it!"

The vampires bowed their heads and began to carry out her order. Meanwhile, Shalltear slowly pulled at her head while crouching. "…I'm going to get scolded… What should I do… But… Huh?" Shalltear raised her face and her eyes stared in the direction of the forest that the Vampire Wolves disappeared into. "…They found something?" She felt her kin disappear in the blink of an eye. They weren't sent back with magic, but instead, killed by someone.

"Throw that woman with the rest and follow! I'll leave behind a marker!" Her decision was swift. Having shouted just those words, Shalltear broke into a run at a speed that seemed to cleave through the wind. Although she was slowed by the forest, even a human on horseback wouldn't have been able to run from the present Shalltear. Having cleared free of the forest in a single breath, Shalltear ran towards the area where she last sensed her kin. At that location were twelve humans.

They each had a different set of equipment. Their equipment weren't plain in appearance, and had unique look to them. For the sake of comparison, they were similar to what Shalltear was wearing. They emanated a great power. Needless to say, since Shalltear did not have any abilities that could identify magic items, it was all based on her intuition.

Regardless, the feeling their weapons gave off reminded her of legendary items. Shalltear burned with questions over who these people were. The twelve men and women had an aura that was hugely different from the humans that she had encountered so far in this world. It was like the difference between a rat and a lion. While Shalltear's eyes moved from one person to another, her gaze stopped on a certain man.

That one… Is he strong? Although the surprised Shalltear wanted to gauge how powerful he was, she was not of the warrior classes and could not get an accurate handle on his strength. Merely that not only was he stronger than her two vampire brides, but even above Pleiades' Solution. Shalltear observed him. She had described him as a man because of his equipment, but his face was androgynous.

Whether to call him a man or a woman, he seemed to be both and neither at the same time. Short with a youthful face, probably still in the midst of his growth, it only made his gender harder to determine. His jet black hair was long enough to touch the ground. His sharp, ruby-like eyes held hints of caution as he stared at Shalltear. With his spear which looked plain, unlike his armor, the man charged at her

"Use it." A voice like a cool lake; hearing his command, a rumble of agitation ran through those around him. Shalltear did not understand what that meant, only that he had ordered them to use an item of considerable power. Perhaps even one that rivalled the power of Shalltear's Divine class item. Although the humans followed the voice and started to move, Shalltear ignored them completely. She was cautious of only one person and everyone else did not pose much of a threat.

At the center of their movements was a woman dressed in strange clothes. It looked like a one-piece dress for women with a deep slit down the side and a round collar. The color was a silvery white, with the image of a five-clawed dragon soaring to the skies stitched in gold thread. In Ainz's world, it was something called a cheongsam. However, the face of the woman in the dress was wrinkled with age. Her exposed legs reminded one of burdocks or dried potatoes. The clothes

did not fit with her appearance. It was to the point that one would want to narrow their eyes; to the point that Shalltear looked away.

But that was to be the last small feeling of incongruity. Everything could have been changed by the smallest of whims. If Ainz hadn't captured Nigan, if Ainz hadn't countered the Slane Theocracy's information magic so strongly, if the theocracy hadn't made the mistake of believing 'the Catastrophic Dragon Lord has resurrected', if Shalltear hadn't been distracted, everything would have changed.

However, the fact that so many ifs coincided, in other words, meant that it was inevitable. The name of the dress was 'Bewitching Calamity, Kei Seke Koku'. An item left behind by the God who saved mankind, the subject of their worship. It held a power that even Shalltear did not possess.

Shudder

Even as the highest level Floor Guardian of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Shalltear's body trembled. It was a warning, almost like a sixth sense. With her instincts setting off alarm bells, Shalltear moved her eyes and fixed it on the old woman. This was a human whom she had to kill, no matter what. Hit with this realization, Shalltear began to move towards her.

The man with the spear blocked her way. "Move!" Shalltear smacked him in earnest. A normal human's weak body would have been torn to pieces, but the man was simply blown away and did not die. Not only that, he still retained his fighting spirit. Shalltear concentrated on the old woman as the focal point and cast her spell. "「Mass Hold Species」!" A number of them had their movements constricted.

The reason Shalltear tied them down was because she deemed them to be more than enough to make up for her previous failure. As the thought passed through her mind, Shalltear's heart became overlapped in white. The feeling of a portion of her mind falling away. She didn't know what it was.

And when the truth of what was happening dawned on her, an enormous shock passed through her and even the undead Shalltear trembled in fear. Mind control. She, an undead with absolute immunity to mind control effects, was having her mind dominated. Shalltear furiously filled her heart, now almost dyed in white, with hatred. As her head swarmed with the countless thoughts of the worst case scenario—

"KUUAAAAAAHHH!!" She screamed and resisted, blood pouring down from her eyes. This mind control that was trying to dirty her, the Floor Guardian of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, she resisted. But as if ignoring Shalltear's desperate struggle, her consciousness continued to be dyed white. She did not even have the luxury of using her teleportation magic. Losing her focus for even an instant would immediately render her completely under the spell's effect.

Shalltear used her class skill and created a 'Purifying Javelin'. A huge javelin imbued with divine energy was still capable of dealing significant damage even if the user had an evil alignment. More importantly, throwing it while using additional mana gave it the effect of never missing its mark. Shalltear, while resisting with all the strength in her body, glared at the old woman who had cast the spell that was dirtying her.

Her eyes did not even reflect the huge, mirror-like shield of the man blocking her path as a threat. Then… She threw. The javelin flew from her hand like it had a will of its own. It was an attack strengthened by every skill that she could scrounge up from her fading consciousness. Its aim true, the attack that looked like a flash of light penetrated the man blocking its way along with his shield and struck the old woman. The two humans throwing up blood, the commotion in the group; this was the last vision of the world that Shalltear saw.

Interlude

The royal capital of the Kingdom of Re-Estize. In the deepest part of the royal capital, over twenty huge and circular towers had been constructed at equal distances from each other and connected by walls, forming the royal castle-town Ro-Lente. Valencia Palace was located within these grounds. Inside the palace, there was a room which held a more functional importance than its gorgeous decoration. Many nobles and ministers-of-state were gathered here to attend a palace meeting.

Amongst them was the figure of the Kingdom's Warrior-Captain, Gazef Stronoff. He knelt before the king Ranpossa III., who sat on his throne, to swear his allegiance. *He seems to have grown even older.* Although only half a month had passed, that was Gazef's impression after comparing the King's current appearance after his return with the one from before his departure. His own beloved monarch. That head was already scattered with pale white hair, the emancipated body was beyond being described as healthy even as a compliment, and his facial complexion was also very poor. The hand holding the scepter was as thin as a twig, and the crown on his head seemed quite heavy.

After his reign of thirty-nine years, he was now sixty years old. Originally it was already time to abdicate the throne to a successor, but the problem lay in the fact that there was no suitable successor to choose from. It was not that there were no princes who could be the successor. Although there were two princes, they were not qualified by far. If his abdication were to happen now, they would definitely become a puppet of the greater nobles.

The old man announced in a weak voice: "Warrior-Captain, it is truly splendid you were able to return safely."

"Yes! Thank you very much, your Majesty!" Hearing these words of concern, Gazef bowed deeply as he replied. "Ah, of course we have already received the report, but we would still request the Warrior-Captain to personally give a detailed explanation of the incident, and what exactly happened."

"As your Majesty commands." Gazef explained in depth the events that took place in Carne village after he had left the capital to the King. He went into particular detail about the mysterious magic caster of the name of Ainz Ooal Gown, but didn't mention the suspected espionage by the Slane Theocracy. This was because in Gazef's judgment, only a few individuals needed to know about this, and the circumstances were not appropriate to reveal it here.

Therefore Gazef talked extensively about the heroic deeds of the man he encountered and how that man risked his life to save the villagers from danger. "This really is a beautiful story. Selflessly placing himself in danger to rescue the weak…" The King's sentence was filled with praise, causing several nobles to utter contemptuous remarks about this Ainz Ooal Gown.

A problematic and suspicious individual. An eccentric person who did not dare reveal his true face to the public. A magic caster with an odd name. Eventually there even arose an opinion that he had orchestrated this attack in order to promote himself. Gazef had to restrain himself from

showing anger. He felt ashamed for being unable to utter a single word in defence of his benefactor who was criticized like this.

Of course, there was a good reason for this. Because the nobles who were cynical towards his benefactor had one thing in common: they all belonged to the large group known as the Greater Nobility Faction. The Kingdom of Re-Estize was a feudal state with the king controlling thirty percent of the territory, the greater nobles holding another thirty percent and the remaining forty percent being controlled by the other, lesser nobles. Right now, the kingdom was internally divided into two camps, competing day and night against each other in a power struggle.

One side supported the monarchy, while the other side, which supported the Greater Nobility faction, included more than half of the six greater nobles. Although they were in the presence of the King, this place had also become an extension of their fighting, a battleground for the two competing factions.

Because of this, being of the pro-monarchy faction and also a confidant of the King, Gazef was unwilling to casually interject. He knew that his clumsy manner of speech had no chance of arguing successfully against these nobles, therefore it was necessary to avoid slipping up and giving others the chance to use his own words against him.

…The Slane Theocracy's covert operatives were able to grasp our movements and appear at a timely moment… This indicates a spy has probably infiltrated the inner workings of the Kingdom. If this is the case, perhaps it is someone among the six greater nobles… Gazef's eyesight drifted towards one particular person amongst the ranks of nobility, a noble with a particularly cold gaze. This person had his blonde hair tied to the back and a pair of slender blue eyes.

His skin had the unhealthy white coloration that suggested it was rarely exposed to sunlight. His lanky figure gave the impression of a viper. Although his age should not have reached forty, his appearance looked exceptionally older because of that unhealthy skin tone. He was one of the six great nobles, called Marquis Raevan.

He constantly switched between the two factions like a bat in order to further his own profits. He was also a noble who covertly approached the King's second prince. *If there is a traitor to the Kingdom, it should be this fellow right?* Noticing Gazef's gaze, Marquis Raevan curled his lips which were already very thin. Seeing that kind of provocative attitude, Gazef's expression became even more rigid.

"With that, the Warrior-Captain's report ends here. There are other important matters which need to be decided upon." The king declared, feeling a little exhausted, telling the nobles to back off for the time being. Gazef walked to the King's side and surveyed the nobles. As a personally trusted subject of the King, he was long accustomed to unpleasant stares.

"Well then, in accordance with usual yearly custom, we shall war with the Empire in a few months' time. This is the next item on today's agenda. Marquis Raevan, explain to everybody."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Like a ghost, the man silently walked up and began to explain in a soft voice. Nobody made a noise. Not only did he have influence over both factions, he was also the one with the most power amongst the six nobles. Nobody dared making an enemy out of him. No

objections were made as Marquis Raevan went through the planned course of action and who would send out how many soldiers.

After he finished explaining, he smiled frivolously at the King and bowed: “The report has been concluded.”

“Thank you, Marquis Raevan. Does anyone have anything they wish to say?” Once again the room became noisy, with whispers being exchanged. “This time it is our turn to repel the opponent. With that, let us then proceed to directly counter-attack the Empire.”

“Absolutely correct. I’ve pretty much become tired of only merely repelling the Empire.”

“That’s true. Let those imperial fools experience our worst.”

“Correct, Earl-sama, just as you say.” The room resounded with the merry laughter of the men wearing fine clothing.

Stop dreaming. If it were possible to refute in such a way, who knew how much fun it would be. The Kingdom and the forces of the neighboring Empire would meet every year on the battleground at Kaze Plains. Until this date, neither side had suffered too serious injuries, but that was because the Empire never committed its full forces. If there was any real intent to topple the Kingdom, there would be no need at all to set camp at Kaze plains and wait for the Kingdom’s army to arrive.

Gazef and a few other nobles who still used their brains reckoned that the Empire used such a method in order to deplete the Kingdom of its national strength. The Kingdom, composed of militia; And the Empire, composed of professional soldiers, and having a hierarchy of Knights.

Which side’s soldiers were superior was obvious with a single glance, hence the Kingdom needed to mobilize twice the numbers of the Empire’s forces from their population and because of the larger amount of troops, the army needed a greater amount of food supplies. Although there were magic items which could produce food, they were only intended to provide nourishment and the resulting food was so unpalatable that even starving people would hesitate to eat them, therefore those could never become the main source of provisions for meals.

Moreover, the Empire’s invasion was just in time for the wheat harvest, leading to a shortage of manpower in villages, who had to delay the wheat harvest as a result. Without having to commit all their forces in an assault, the Kingdom’s national strength would naturally weaken, following which the royal power would also wane.

That was the reason the Greater Nobility faction turned a blind eye to this. They were happy that the authority and power of the enemy faction, that of the royals, were decreasing. *Once our national strength became feeble, the Empire would invade with full strength! Do you really think the enemy is satisfied with the current skirmishes? Why is your way of thinking so naive?* Gazef was aggravated by those nobles who believed that their own absolute power would perpetually exist.

“So what you are saying is that the suspicious magic caster, who rescued the Warrior-Captain, could possibly be someone from the Empire with the objective of infiltrating our side for espionage?”

“Ah, so that was it, you’re right. I heard the Empire has a Magic Caster Academy, so this is very likely.”

“The names of the people in the Slane Theocracy consist of a given name, a baptized name and a family name, is it possible that this name is a pseudonym?”

“Men of that sort who appear in the Kingdom are always those who make others uncomfortable, do you think we should come up with a way to handle him?”

“Perhaps you can also consider capturing him. The adventurer's guild does whatever they please by employing a large number of magic casters. It’s a problem that another such being exists. It will be better for us to find a way to place him under our authority.”

“The money paid to the Guild cannot be taken lightly either. Adventurers living in the Kingdom charge very unreasonable fees for repelling monsters currently residing in the country!”

“Bringing him here should be the best option.”

Hearing this, Gazef could not stay silent any longer. He absolutely could not allow them to continue slandering the benefactor who saved himself, the villagers and his subordinates. “One moment please. First of all, that magic caster is extremely friendly to the Kingdom. The way of thinking, of wanting to arrest this kind of benevolent person is really unwise—” Gazef gave his opinion in an attempt to divert the palace meeting’s increasingly biased discussion direction. Several nobles showed obvious looks of disgust.

With only his sword talent, Gazef climbed into his current position. In the eyes of the nobles whom had long histories of heritage, he was nothing more than an overnight wealthy upstart. This was why Gazef was detested by them. Furthermore his swordsmanship was unparalleled within the Kingdom, which only deepened the nobles’ hostility.

The hardest part for these distinguished nobles to accept were men with abilities that surpassed their own, even though their status was lower than their own. Several nobles did not wait for Gazef to finish speaking before verbally denying Ainz Ooal Gown one after another, and others followed suit in echoing their denial.

The king seated on the throne said hoarsely, with a hint of admiration: “…Enough. We conclude that the Warrior-Captain’s judgment is not wrong.”

“Well… if Your Majesty says so…” The nobles did not refute, temporarily holding back their ridiculing smiles. Gazef sent a look of gratitude towards the monarch to whom he had sworn allegiance and who had in turn elevated Gazef’s status. Meeting Gazef’s gaze, the King nodded gently in indication.

♦ ♦ ♦

After every power struggle and flattery meeting, his heart and mind would become exhausted. However, Gazef did not let this show on his face as he accompanied the King along the palace corridor. The King, who walked with a cane, had injured his knee in a past war and his gait would sometimes be unsteady, but considering the King’s dignity, Gazef did not extend his arm in assistance.

Moreover, if he had already reached the condition which required the assistance of others in order to walk, the great nobles faction's voices in support of abdication would become stronger, requesting the King to abdicate in favor of a puppet prince manipulated by them. Although Gazef felt saddened, the King still had to walk with his own strength.

Arriving near the royal quarters after walking slowly along the corridor, the King suddenly spoke: "…The nobles' strength is still needed to curb the Empire's invasion. If their advice is bluntly rejected, this country would split itself apart without having to wait for the Empire to invade." Although the content was abrupt, Gazef was very clear on what the King was trying to say, therefore he could only bit down on his lips.

"I envy the Empire." Gazef did not know the words that would console the King's whispers. Three generations ago, the Empire had also been a feudal state. However, the power of the nobles gradually weakened, and when the current emperor ascended the throne, it became an absolute monarchy.

The current emperor, Jircniv Rune Farlord el Nix. During his ascension to the throne, the killings were so bloody that it was almost enough to form a river of blood, therefore this youth was henceforth known as the Blood Emperor. Gazef recalled coming across him in the battlefield, the Emperor who once wanted to recruit him. That emperor truly was a born ruler.

"Because of my superficial way of thinking, I was unable to protect you, and for that I am sincerely sorry. Even when issuing you a dangerous order, I was unable to give you the best equipment for the job… We are asking for your forgive-, no, please forgive me… Your subordinates also lost their lives because of this."

"No, not at all…"

"Gazef, it may not make a difference, but although it cannot be called an apology, I would like to give recompense to the families of the deceased. In addition, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude towards Master Gown for rescuing my most loyal and trusted aide."

Even though it wasn't the King himself who was rescued, he still wanted to personally express his gratitude towards a mere lowly commoner. This matter should be problematic, but… "I believe a virtuous man like him will be satisfied with just those words."

"Is that so… Oh?" Two figures walking along the corridor became reflected in the King's eyes, especially eye-catching was the beautiful girl who walked in front. That girl's beauty was rumored to be beyond what could be captured on a portrait; a truly indescribable beauty.

The King let out a smile. His love for the young princess exceeded that towards his other children. Renner Theiere Chardelon Ryle Vaiself. The 3rd princess inherited her dazzling mother's appearance, and was renowned by others as the "Golden Princess". Being sixteen years old, she had already reached an age where marriage was nothing out of the ordinary.

This was also another reason for the nobles' penchant to create trouble. The title was derived from her golden hair, silky smooth and supple as it draped over the back of her neck. Those healthy-looking smiling lips were a light cherry blossom pink in color. Dark blue eyes like sapphires shone with warmth and vibrancy.

The fashionable white dress further strengthened the image of purity she gave off to others. Around her neck hung a golden necklace, looking as if it was the emblem of her noble soul. Standing behind her was a youth who was in the process of growing from a boy into a man. He was wearing a white armour and could be described with the term 'raging fire'. Above his curved sanpaku eyes were two rough eyebrows. His face bore an expression of a will as strong as steel, with a tanned dark color. For convenience of movement and the avoidance of battle as well as other reasons, his blond hair was cut in a neat and tidy fashion.

This youth called Climb was someone whom Gazef did not know how to get along with. It wasn't that he disliked him, rather he liked him. However, Gazef simply found difficulty in dealing with the heavy atmosphere that he gave off. Gazef did not hate serious individuals, but he still hoped that the other side could relax a bit. Still, Gazef thoroughly understood Climb's feelings.

Climb who was always by the side of the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, would often suffer the jealousy and resentment of others, and should not even have any friends. Also, his origin was also like Gazef's… No, even worse than Gazef's. Therefore he could not display any weakness, for none of his actions could afford to allow his mistress to suffer any criticism.

"Father, Warrior-Captain." The King smiled towards Lana who ran over with light steps, and nodded towards the deeply bowing Climb. "It seems your meeting is finally over."

"Yes. There were many topics to discuss."

"So it was like that. I've thought about it for a second, and wanted to allow father to listen to my idea, therefore waited here for you."

"Is that so? Then I am really sorry." Her ideas were no trivial matter. The other reason why she was hailed as the "Golden Princess" was because she had a nimble mind and admirable spirit. Not only did she establish landmark institutions, but also proposed new bills. Her proposals were almost all relief measure plans for the civilians at the bottom of society. Moreover, it was not by way of charity, but by preparing a good welfare policy, giving the civilians who were willing to help themselves the opportunity to become self-sufficient.

Not only that, but also at the same time improving the status of being a civilian, boosting their loyalty towards the royal family, strengthening productivity, all which affected the policies which the royal family had interests in. Although there were obstructions from the nobles who did not wish for the strengthening of civilian status, and almost all of the established institutions were dissolved, the broad range of acquainted people and the people who received her grace all gave a high evaluation of her efforts.

"Then I shall listen to you attentively when we return to your room."

"However, father, it is now time for your daughter's walk. Climb and I shall wander about the nearby surroundings then return." Hearing the Princess indicate that her walk was more important than a discussion with the King, Climb's expression became even stiffer. Gazef felt some pity for him. *However, Princess Renner has always had her own way of doing things. As an attendant, he could not complain.* "Is that so? Then go, and come find me in my room to discuss this when you return."

“I understand. Let’s be off, Climb.”

“Pardon me.”

As a warrior, Gazef spoke to the deeply bowing Climb: “Climb, you also need to diligently improve your swordsmanship, to be able to protect Princess Renner under any circumstances.”

“Yes!” Climb nodded vigorously. Conversely, Renner let out a discontented voice. “Climb is fine. He will definitely be able to protect me at any moment.” Those words were unfounded. However hearing the Princess say it seemed to give it an element of truth.

“Then we shall be off, Climb.” Renner’s slender fingers tugged the corner of Climb’s clothes. Although it was just an unconscious gesture/act, Climb’s expression became even more rigid after noticing it, becoming as hard as a diamond. “Yes, Princess.” Even though Climb’s face was expressionless while he was being pulled away by the princess, sadness and resignation could be seen in his eyes.

Although the two people forgot to pay their respects, the King did not appear to mind and was only silently looking at the two as if looking at something he had long lost in the past. “…As King, feeling pity cannot be a good thing.” Climb was of unknown origin. He was a poor child picked up by Renner when she had ventured outside the castle. Only skin and bones, he was a small child almost about to die from starvation, continuously striving to protect his savior. No, merely striving was not a sufficient description. He had no talent in either the sword or magic nor was he blessed with any particular outstanding athletic ability.

However, he did diligently train bit by bit. Of course, his talent was not at Gazef’s level, nor did it reach the level of heroes. Even so, his strength forged by hard work and practice still reached the highest level of all of the Kingdom’s soldiers. However, there are still some things which cannot be surpassed. Those would be status, power, and also being a man of value. Princess Renner’s value as a person was extremely high, and Climb simply could not match up.

“My lord’s heart is very considerate.”

“Although I know it is foolish, I still wish for at least one of my daughters… To be able to attain freedom. No… My other daughters will definitely scold me… I’ve really become old, thinking about these kinds of things.” The King gazed at an empty space, as if there was someone there: “Perhaps, I must also allow this daughter to fall into misfortune.”

If the Princess were to be married at this moment, the groom would definitely be someone from the Great Nobility Faction. Gazef, who shared similar thoughts, did not speak. It was because he did not know what to say. The only people who were able to understand the king’s troubles were those in a similar position, and Gazef was not one of those people. A surge of silence filled the space between the two men. To shake off this silence, they strode forward once again.

3章 混乱と把握

Confusion and Control

Part 1

After the transfer, Ainz saw a hill in front of him. No, it wasn't high enough to be a hill, it was just a mound with a mere six meters of elevation from the base to the top. Short vegetation with pointed leaves grew lushly on the mound, giving it the appearance of having been there for a long time. Looking around, there were many similar protrusions, giving the impression that the general vicinity was of this terrain. However, this was obviously untrue. This terrain had been created through magic by Floor Guardian Mare. Buried under this layer of earth was the Great Tomb of Nazarick's stony surface.

Ainz activated 'Flight' and instantly flew over the mound. In his broad field of vision he saw a single piece of land, overgrown with weeds. Not even the tiniest bit of the Great Tomb of Nazarick was visible, as if it was entirely covered by the mounds. Ainz didn't linger over this scene and maintained his original speed as he continued his flight. After passing a certain point, the scenery changed with the sensation of piercing through a thin membrane. The hilly terrain disappeared and the familiar sight of home was reflected in Ainz' eyes.

That was the proof of having broken through the protective Illusion barrier. Without reducing the speed of 'Flight', Ainz's destination was the large and solemn mausoleum at the center, because it was the only entrance leading into the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Flying straight to the stairs of the grey temple and finding numerous figures below him, Ainz repressed his anxiety and landed in front of them.

"Ainz-sama, welcome home." Along with a woman's tender voice, many other voices arose as well to welcome Ainz back home. Standing at the front, dressed in a gown of pure white, was Albedo, the Great Tomb of Nazarick's Overseer, who was also the person with the greatest understanding of the current situation.

The four maids tending to her were battlemaids, and standing a little farther behind were level eighty servants. After Ainz finished his conversation with Albedo using 'Message', he immediately ordered Narberal to use teleport. Not even five minutes have passed since the end of 'Message' and Albedo was able to organize this many people to greet him upon his return allowed one to glimpse at her organizational abilities.

Feeling impressed, Ainz waved his hand gently in response to the servant's greetings. He was supposed to say a few words in appreciation, but it wasn't appropriate under the current situation. "Albedo, about the issue discussed over 'Message'…" Did Shalltear really betray us? He was about to say these words, but hesitated. Because deep in his worried mind, he was afraid that saying them would turn Shalltear's betrayal into irrevocable fact… Furthermore, discussing a topic like this in front of the servants was too dangerous.

"Yes. Would you like to discuss this issue elsewhere?"

"You are right… Let us discuss this in the Throne Hall, alright?"

"As you wish. Well then Yuri, present Ainz-sama's ring." From amongst the battlemaids standing behind them, a spectacle-wearing maid quietly stepped forward. Although the combat maid outfit she wore was the same as Narberal's, there were some differences in the details. Narberal's maid outfit was intended to protect her, whereas Yuri's clothes emphasized ease of movement.

This was confirmed by the lack of a metal plate on the front of her skirt. Her metal gauntlets had prominent spikes. With clenched fists, they would become lethal weapons. The top of the wide blue necklace was decorated with small translucent gems which didn't reflect light, but sparkled like a swaying flame.

With her hair tied into a low-cropped bun at the back of her head, and proper-looking facial features that were both sharp and cold, she gave an intelligent impression. This was Yuri Alpha. Vice-captain of the battlemaids. Sebas, who served as the leader of the battlemaids, was a man, therefore it was said amongst the maids that the person responsible for holding the team together was Yuri.

She was carrying a tray covered with purple cloth with both of her hands. Resting on the purple cloth was a ring. A ring of Ainz Ooal Gown. Ainz picked up the ring and placed it on his ring finger. Since the ring would allow the wearer to move around the Great Tomb of Nazarick at will, every time Ainz went to an outside city he would leave his ring behind, because he was worried about having it stolen from him.

Looking at the ring on his skeletal hand, Ainz nodded in approval. The unease of not wearing the ring for several days disappeared, filling him with great satisfaction. "Well then, let's go Albedo." Because they couldn't teleport to the Throne Room directly, he activated the ring's power to move to the room right before it. Accompanied by Albedo, Ainz opened the thick, heavy door and headed deeper inside, towards the direction of the crystal-like throne.

As they walked, Ainz voiced the question he wanted to ask earlier. "Before we start, I wish to ask several questions. You said that Shalltear betrayed us. What was the reaction of Sebas, who was at the same place? He didn't turn traitor too?"

"Yes, he did not show any signs of betrayal."

"Well then, have you asked Sebas for related details?"

"Yes, we have already completed our inquiry. According to Sebas, they encountered bandits. After that, Shalltear supposedly went ahead to the opponent's lair to capture more bandits. During this period of time, nothing suspicious occurred. She even repeatedly expressed her dedication towards Ainz-sama."

"So, that's to say, whatever happened afterwards was what instigated her rebellion."

"Yes… In addition, it seems that she also brought along two vampire brides, but they appear to have been exterminated."

"…Is that so. Those were just minions… No, this means something happened which was sufficient to exterminate them. Well then, my turn to explain what has happened on my side."

By the time they reached the stairs leading to the throne, the discussion was almost finished. However, since they had not gone over the most important issue relating to the cemetery, Ainz continued to talk. After it was all over, Albedo, who had been listening quietly nodded her head in understanding.

Although Ainz wished to ask whether the way he handled the situation was appropriate, there were more important issues that he wanted to know about. Ainz looked at the throne and chanted the predetermined code words: "Open Mainscreen." A translucent window opened up in front which looked similar to a control panel, yet distinctly different. The window was divided into several tabs, and each page was filled with densely packed text.

This was the Great Tomb of Nazarick's management system. Inside, it recorded the daily required administrative expenses: the current servant types and quantity, the activated magical traps, etc. The settings could likewise be roughly managed from here as well. In Yggdrasil, this could be viewed regardless of time or location. However, Ainz found out through experiments that in this world, this system could only be operated at the heart of the tomb, the Throne Room.

Having to come here every time is slightly troublesome… But the ring allows teleport… So there is no need to be too concerned about it. With experienced movements, Ainz opened the NPC tab. A list of names of all of the NPCs collectively created by the Guild members were recorded on this page. After changing the displayed names from the original alphabetically arranged Katakana to levels in descending order, Ainz browsed the list from the top, and after his eyes stopped on a single spot, he silently turned to gaze upon Albedo's face.

"Yes, it has already become like this." Amongst the series of names in white text, only Shalltear Bloodfallen's name had turned black. Ainz knew the meaning behind what the change in the name meant, but nonetheless… After repeatedly looking it over twice, three times, making sure that he did not observe wrongly, Ainz screamed 'impossible!' inside his mind. If skeletal faces could move, his would have an expression of dismay. "…Is it death?" Ainz steadfastly asked Albedo. He hoped silently that perhaps the transfer to this world had caused some changes in the systems. However, the truth that Albedo spoke could not be any crueler.

"If it were death, the name would disappear and leave a blank space. Wouldn't this mean that she has betrayed us?"

"Ah… You're right." Ainz answered Albedo like this, then recalled the Yggdrasil days when he had seen this kind of text change. Although Albedo said it was betrayal, the system's meanings were slightly different. In a broad sense it was similar to betrayal, but that was the result of being subject to mind control from a third party, causing the temporarily hostile NPC's name to display a color change.

Impossible. Ainz once again denied this reality inside his mind. Like him, Shalltear Bloodfallen was an undead, which meant that she should have been impervious to all types of mental influence regardless of whether they were beneficial or detrimental. How could Shalltear possibly be affected by mind control? Shalltear simply betraying Nazarick was relatively more believable. She could, for example, have a particular reason for her betrayal, dissatisfaction with her own treatment or outsiders offering better conditions.

If that was not the case, then after being sent to this world, something beyond Ainz' knowledge had happened to cause the incident. Ainz recalled Nfirea's face. Correct, if there were those with innate talents with unknown powers, perhaps it was possible to influence the mental state of undead. "…Could it be a special influence from being affected by this world's peculiar beings and phenomenon?"

"That is uncertain. However Shalltear's betrayal is an undisputable fact. I recommend we form a subjugation team immediately." At this moment, it suddenly occurred to Ainz: the servants, who were welcoming him back just a while ago, could they have been gathered with the intention of subjugating Shalltear?

In retrospect, the group had a selection of many servants which were rare in Nazarick, with sacred attribute attacks which were which were effective against undead. Albedo continued in a firm tone: "I wish to volunteer to serve as the team's commander. With Ainz-sama's permission, I would also like to appoint Cocytus as deputy commander, and also to select Mare to be included in the team."

This selection, which was the perfect line-up to eliminate Shalltear, demonstrated Albedo's seriousness in the matter. Shalltear Bloodfallen was extremely powerful. If you were to simply compare her to the other Guardians, with the exception of Gargantua, she was the strongest. To be absolutely certain of victory against her, it was necessary to send the team members Albedo had chosen, otherwise it would be considerably difficult.

"What is your opinion on this?"

"No. It's too early to arrive at this conclusion. We need to first ascertain the reason for Shalltear's betrayal."

"Ainz-sama has a really benevolent heart. However, regardless of her reasons, simply the fact that she dared to stand as the supreme leader's enemy makes her undeserving of such kindness."

"That's incorrect, Albedo. I am not showing kindness to Shalltear, I'm only trying to understand the reason for her betrayal." If such a thing could happen to Shalltear, then it was necessary to find a way to resolve it. If it was dissatisfaction with how they're treated, other servants and NPCs could have the same problem. It was necessary to directly address the future possibility that it would occur to another servant, and to take the necessary countermeasures. Even if it was forced control from being affected by abilities like innate talent, it was necessary to find a countermeasure.

Hearing the 'Message' informing him that the NPC created by his past comrades had betrayed him, he felt like his position as Guild Leader was being rejected by his Guild companions, it was a severe blow that almost brought him to his knees. However, this was already beyond the scope of a guildmaster. This problem shouldn't be resolved with his authority as Guild Leader, but as the Supreme Ruler of Nazarick. It was too early to be discouraged. Hypothetically — although it was impossible — if it turned out that Shalltear was actually subject to forced control, then it was necessary to rescue her.

A superior who put on an amazing countenance, yet was unable to hold out a saving hand during times of trouble, would fundamentally be unqualified to be the leader. As ruler, it was necessary for Ainz to protect his underlings.

“Well then, where is Shalltear at the moment, has anyone determined her whereabouts?”

“Extreme apologies, it has yet to be confirmed. Taking into account the possibility that Shalltear could attack Nazarick, all of her immediate subordinates were locked up. At the same time, to strengthen our defenses, we also dispatched servants to the first floor.”

“Is that so. If that is the case, then first we must determine Shalltear’s location. Let us visit your elder sister.”

Part 2

Nazarick’s fifth floor was an extremely cold area, created with a glacier as concept. Producing the illusion of a blue iceberg emitting a glow from within, there was a tombstone-like object standing amidst the endless white land. Snow fell from the self-shrouding thick layer of clouds in the sky, dancing in the freezing wind composed of icy cold water vapor. In the distance, a frozen forest completely covered in snow could be seen, like a giant hiding under a white mantle.

Ainz’ clothes were blown about, flapping violently in the chilling cold wind. Remembering what Albedo beside him was wearing, Ainz asked: “Are you cold? If there is a need, wear your armor. We have enough time for you to change.” Any ice attack against Ainz was completely ineffective, and he would feel no coldness no matter how freezing it was. However, it was not the same for Albedo. This degree of frostiness would not harm her if she wore her full armor, but Albedo was currently wearing a white dress. Although she was asked before the transfer as well, it could be that she was just putting on a false front.

But Albedo gave the worried Ainz a tender smile. “Thank you for your concern, but there is no need to be worried, Ainz-sama. This chill is absolutely not a problem.” Ainz nodded and replied: “I see.” Originally this place would apply ice damage and movement-slowing area effect. But its activation cost money, therefore it was currently deactivated.

This prior decision was a stroke of good luck. Or perhaps Albedo possessed magical items or abilities to negate ice damage? Basically, NPCs’ equipment were all conferred by the Guild member who created them. The ones Ainz knew well were Pandora’s Actor and a few others, and after the transfer he had briefly looked over everyone’s data.

Ainz cast aside the doubts in his mind, and looked at the magnificent two-story high mansion in front of him. In this cold world of ice and snow, only this structure exuded a strange atmosphere. Like a building from a story, it gave off a fairy-tale feeling. However the surface was a frozen layer of ice, creating a cold, discomforting ambience. In fact, this building did not have a fairy-tale name. It was called the Frozen Prison. All enemies of Nazarick were locked in here.

“Let’s go.” Ainz succinctly instructed with a short phrase, then pushed open the large, ice-coated door. Even with its surface covered by a thick layer of ice, the door still opened easily, as if it was welcoming a guest. The moment the doors opened, a gust of cold wind rushed out. The temperature inside the prison was even lower than that of the arctic world outside.

With the cold wind hitting her body, Albedo started to shiver. Seeing this, Ainz pulled a crimson cloak out of thin air, the hem of which had the pattern of a burning flame. “Wear this cloak,

Albedo. It might not have any particularly strong magical effect, but it should be more than enough to block the cold."

"Something so valuable! My extreme gratitude! I will treasure this for the rest of my life." Although he never said that he was going to give it to her, seeing Albedo's smiling face, he didn't elaborate and merely looked beyond the doorway.

A silent and dark passageway extended all the way into the prison. "Ah, yes. The remnants of the Sunlight Scripture are also locked in here."

"Yes. It's only proper that Neuronist Painkill guards them strictly. So warm… Like being embraced in Ainz-sama's bosom… Fufufu."

"…Is that so. Well that's great." Being in my fleshless and skinless embrace should not be warm. However, Ainz wasn't so dense that he would say this aloud. Putting Albedo, who was squirming about fully immersed in the cloak, out of sight, Ainz slowly walked ahead.

"What are you doing? There isn't much time left… Under these special circumstances."

"Yes, yes!" Ainz' passive skill 'Undead Blessing' allowed him to observe all of the undead concealed inside the place. Feeling that this would be bothersome, Ainz disabled the skill, ignoring the undead moving along the corridor, covered in a layer of blue white ice. If he did not take prior measures to deal with the moving obstacles, perhaps he would slip on the completely frozen corridor.

"…Ainz-sama, shall I call for Neuronist Painkill? She did not show herself to guide the way, letting the Supreme Ruler of Nazarick enter without a guide…"

"No need. Although it isn't a bad thing, that fellow talks a lot. Currently there are some emergency matters which need to be resolved, so I hope to avoid wasting time as much as possible."

"Understood. Then after this matter is concluded, I shall tell Neuronist Painkill not to talk so much."

"No, no, that will not be necessary. I do not find it discomforting."

"But then…"

Seeing Albedo beside him frown, Ainz allowed a smile to surface on his unmoving face. As the master, he felt it was a good thing that his subordinates would think about what was best for him, but if it wasn't handled well, it could result in the subordinates not daring to complain in the future. "It's nothing. I love all of you, regardless of your strong points or weak points, because you were all created by my past comrades. I would be in the wrong if I felt displeasure when looking upon any settings which were made with dedication."

Correct. If Shalltear's betrayal was due to her settings, then it was necessary to forgive her, because she would only be following the intentions of her creator Peroroncino. However, Peroroncino wasn't the kind of person to plant a bad seed inside the Guild. This confused Ainz, since

Peroroncino was the type who enjoyed joking around, but dislike damaging relations between companions.

Even so, is it really an external reason? Because that text display means mind-control… But then there is no way to confirm this. Or perhaps there were some changes in the settings after arriving in this world. I have yet to completely memorize all of the NPCs' personality settings too. Furthermore, some parts of the NPCs' personality settings were similar to the Guild members who created them… I think there shouldn't be anyone who could completely export his or her personality into settings, therefore it could be due to this. Speaking of which, about Shalltear… Could it be that her settings contain something akin to a timed explosive mechanism? Because her creator enjoyed H-Games, and input some kind of girl game conquest event in her… Woah, that's very possible.

Ainz gave a tired sigh. At the same time he felt the woman beside him display an abnormal change. Although she was only looking forward and walking silently, it was different from earlier, because she was not following Ainz' pace. Furthermore although she was facing forward, she was not looking ahead, and her eyesight was fixed on a certain point. When Ainz realized that Albedo was muttering something, he perked up his ears to listen.

"I love you… I love you… I love you…" This phrase was endlessly repeated, like a broken tape recorder. "…Hey Albedo, I said that I love all of you. Everybody… Hm?" Albedo moved oddly as she turned her head. "No, but still, that is to say, it also includes loving me!"

"Ah… Yes indeed."

"Goooh!" With her feet close together, Albedo hopped in a cute fashion and crashed into the ceiling. That was the cons of people with extraordinary physical ability.

Bump! No, rather it should be bang. The ceiling let out a startling loud noise, letting others know just how big of an impact it received. Hearing this sound similar to an explosion, supernatural semi-translucent monster-like entities slowly appeared from the floor and the ceiling. These were the undead hidden in this prison cell which were picked up earlier by Ainz' ability.

"Ah, you guys can step down. It's nothing." In front of Ainz was Albedo who was so delighted that she was about to burst into song. Although having collided with the ceiling, her race's ability could reduce damage, therefore it caused no pain at all. The different types of undead respectfully bowed and withdrew, disappearing entirely, and returned to their guard positions.

"…Albedo, we are almost at your elder sister's room. Are you prepared?" The previously jubilant Albedo instantly turned serious. "Yes. Then I shall take out the doll."

"Hm, give it to me." Albedo stretched out one hand towards the wall. A white transparent arm stretched out of the wall, placing a doll on Albedo's hand. It was a baby doll, about the same size as a real baby. Ainz took the doll, staring at it without blinking.

"It really is disgusting." It was modelled on an exaggerated baby's shape, like a completely distorted cupid doll. The large eyes rolling around were particularly nauseating. Ainz furrowed his non-existing brows and looked towards the end of the passageway. Over there was a large mural in the center around a door.

There was a mother and baby. It was a painting of a mother cuddling her baby. If it were only this, then it would be a beautiful painting. Perhaps because it was made long ago, some areas had lost their colors and its appearance became appalling. It was almost impossible to discern the baby's image, only leaving behind something similar to a wreckage.

Ainz pushed open the door. The doors slid open silently and cries of babies could be heard… Not just one or two, it wasn't even an echo. The cries numbered in the tens, even hundreds, coming together to form one sound before being heard by Ainz and Albedo. However, no such babies could be seen inside the room. Although they could not be seen, they were definitely there. At the center of the empty room bereft of furniture, was a woman gently rocking a cradle.

Even as Ainz and Albedo entered the room, the woman dressed in black remained silent, merely keeping to herself and rocking the cradle. It was not possible to see her face, because it was entirely concealed by her black hair. Ordinarily if an NPC saw the Supreme Ruler (Ainz) yet ignored him, Albedo would definitely chastise it loudly. However she didn't say anything. Ainz knew why, because Albedo's slightly guarded posture already spoke volumes.

"Is it about time to start?"

"It should be. Please be cautious." As if the words spoken between them was the signal, the woman's movements suddenly froze and she became motionless. Following this, she slowly reached into the rocking cradle and gently picked up the baby inside. No, that was not a real baby, but a doll. "Wrongwrongwrongwrong." She vigorously shook then threw it out. The doll which was thrown out with full force shattered to pieces as it smashed against the wall.

"Mybabymybabymybabymybaby—!" With the sound of her gnashing teeth, as if this was the signal, the cries from the floor and the walls gradually grew louder and louder. The source of the noise eventually revealed itself as the semi-translucent baby-shaped slabs of meat slid down from the surroundings. "Tabula Smaragdina really did configure many monsters in this place… I wonder how much money he spent in the end."

This baby-like squirming meat pile was close to level 20 and called a Carrion Baby. In Yggdrasil, all one had to do was pay in-game currency or real cash to manually spawn a monster inside a labyrinth. These were different from the ones that respawned naturally and did not revive when killed. It was considered a luxury by most players and was rarely used outside of role playing.

Manually placing so many Carrion Babies, even if they were low level, showed how fastidious Tabula Smaragdina truly was. As Ainz was feeling impressed, the woman took out a large pair of scissors from somewhere and held it tightly in her hand. Sharp eyes from that messy head of hair glared at Ainz and Albedo.

"Youyouyouyou, stolestolestolestolemychildmychildmychildmychild—!"

"…She really is your elder sister. You and she are quite alike."

"Eh? Is, is that so?" As if regarding Ainz and Albedo's leisurely talk as a sign of malice, the woman used her murderous intent to fuel her charge towards Ainz. Using only a few steps to reduce the distance between them to zero, the woman in black mourning clothes dashed over with an abnormally large stride. The woman stabbed her scissors at Ainz—

“Your child is right here.” After Ainz gave the doll to the woman, her actions froze as if a stop button had been pressed. Following this, she tossed aside the scissors and slowly accepted the doll. “Good child good child good child!” She hugged her beloved child tenderly, as if she would never again let go. Afterwards, she carefully placed the baby back into the cradle, and then turned her hair-covered face towards Ainz and Albedo: “Momonga-sama, and my cute little sister, have you been well?”

“It’s been a while Nigredo. I’m pleased to see that you… Well, haven’t changed…”

Throughout this conversation Ainz managed to maintain his composure because he had already witnessed this crazy scene before in the game. *I really did scream that time.* A certain Guild member said he had created a new character, and took Ainz and some of the other Guild members to have a look. This resulted in everybody unanimously screaming out together, joining together to use all of their power to attack Nigredo. It was a nostalgic memory.

“Elder sister, it’s been a while.” Correct, Nigredo was Albedo’s elder sister. Coincidentally, she was also an NPC created by Tabula Smaragdina. If Albedo was a strong demonstration of the player Tabula Smaragdina’s favorite gap moe, then Nigredo was the strong manifestation of his other passion, horror films.

He wasn’t a bad person, but he had a strong personality, in various ways. During normal discussions, he would be coherent. However as the talk became more in-depth, various parts of his personality that were hard to associate with would begin to surface. Whilst he was remembering his past Guild member, Nigredo parted her hair to make way for her previously concealed face, revealing her real appearance. Perhaps she thought that concealing her face was disrespectful, but Ainz wished she had just left it as is. Her face was truly grotesque - no skin, but rather a mass of exposed muscle.

There were no lips, only beautiful pearly teeth. There were no eyelids, only brightly shining eyes. Looking at the teeth or the eyes individually, they would be pretty, but seeing it as a whole could only be revolting. The ugly face like those appearing in horror films contorted frighteningly. Although the lack of skin made it harder to determine, she was different from Ainz. Her face still had muscle so it could be inferred that it that expression should be a smile.

“And Momonga-sama, for what reason are you…”

“…Ah, sorry. That time you were not at the Throne Hall so you don’t know. I am no longer called Momonga, my name has since been changed to Ainz Ooal Gown. From today onwards call me Ainz.” After hearing a soft gasp, Nigredo then slowly bowed her head: “Understood, Ainz-sama.”

“Well then Nigredo, I’m here to ask for your help. Can you use your ability to aid me?”

“My ability? Is it biological? Or is it non-biological?”

“…Biological for now… Alive, right? Let me explain to you clearly. The target is Shalltear Bloodfallen.”

“The Floor Guardian…? I’ve been disrespectful. If it is Ainz-sama’s command, I shall take immediate action.” Although Nigredo’s voice was full of doubt, she still gave an immediate response to the request. “Please, elder sister.”

After playfully giving a thumbs up in response to Albedo's request, Nigredo began to activate several kinds of magic. They were abundant in variety, Ainz found that some these spells were familiar, and he just instructed Narberal to cast them last night. Nigredo was a magic caster, one of the high level NPCs who held a position close to the highest tier in Nazarick. Although it wasn’t visible from her outer appearance, her class was specialized towards the investigation type, the collection of information. That was why Ainz had come here to ask for her assistance in locating Shalltear.

With a speed fitting for the power that she possessed, Nigredo was able to quickly report the results. “Found.”

“Cast a ‘Crystal Monitor’.” After activating the spell, the crystal monitor which shimmered into existence displayed an armored figure standing vacantly in a patch of open land in the middle of a forest. Ainz voiced his praise: “Incredible, pinpointing the exact location of the target, it really is a well-deserved reputation for specialized magic cast—”

The words of praise disappeared as the image became more vivid. The person displayed on the monitor display wore a full body armor dyed in a blood-like crimson color. Only the face part was open, revealing a large hole in the helmet which was shaped like the head of a swan, with bird-like feathers protruding from either side. Wing-designed decorations hung from the chest and shoulders, and the lower half of the body was a bright red dress.

One hand was holding a giant, bizarre-shaped spear, similar to a dropper used in chemistry class. This was Shalltear Bloodfallen’s full battle mode, a divine magic caster which had the specialized combat ability of the Valkyrie job. “Spuit Lance! It was the Divine class magic item given from Peroroncino to Shalltear!” Albedo let out a dismayed voice after seeing Shalltear’s weapon.

Ainz had Divine class items, so many that he could cover every part of his body with them. However, it did not mean these items could be easily manufactured. Yggdrasil magic items were created from embedded computer data crystals, but then the performance of computer data crystals dropped by monsters was uneven, therefore to manufacture Divine class items it was necessary to have several “extremely rare loot” computer data crystals for it to be possible.

Not only that, if you wanted these computer data crystals to be embedded into a container — such as a sword-type weapon — it had to be a weapon forged from ultra-rare metal for it to be possible.

As such, even for level 100 players, it was common not to have a single Divine class item. Even Ainz Ooal Gown, a guild that ranked in the top ten, did not arm every NPCs with Divine class items. They would only allow them to possess one or two at the most.

And Shalltear Bloodfallen possessed the Divine class item Spuit Lance. The name sounded a little silly, but its ability was extremely vicious. Some computer data crystals could absorb a set amount of harm to recover the equipment user’s stamina, and Spuit Lance was a prime example of strengthening this capability. “…Let’s go right now.”

"Huh? Ah, please wait a minute! Shalltear is already fully armed. I believe a battle is imminent, therefore it is necessary to pick some bodyguards for Ainz-sama's protection."

"There is no time. If negotiations fail, we can withdraw immediately—"

『Ainz-sama, pardon me for bothering you.』 The voice of a woman could be heard in his mind. It was Narberal who had remained in E-Rantel. This poorly timed call made Ainz slightly annoyed. "What is it Narberal? Right now—" *I am busy.* Ainz who was planning to say this stopped midway. Because he remembered interrupting Entoma's 'Message' last night. Although it couldn't be helped, but if Ainz had acted immediately back then, the situation might be different now. He could had given the task of rescuing Nfirea to Narberal.

The slight feeling of remorse made Ainz reply calmly. The NPCs treated Ainz as absolutely supreme, therefore even if his judgment was wrong, it was still very easy to place Ainz' words as precedence. Because of this, Ainz had to retain his composure, making sure to take careful and cautious actions, to avoid making mistakes. *For an ordinary person like me, this really is an unreasonable demand…*

While mocking his own extremely flawed judgment, Ainz smiled as he reckoned that it really was not possible. Sensing that Narberal on the other end of the 'Message' exuded the atmosphere of a servant waiting for her master, Ainz trembled as if he was struck by lightning. *What am I thinking? I am Ainz Ooal Gown's Supreme Ruler, the one whom everybody calls by this name. Correct, I am not Suzuki. Impossible? Wrong, since I have chosen to call myself by this name, then it is necessary to change the impossible into the possible.*

"…No, nothing. What is it? Are you only contacting me via 'Message' because of an emergency situation?"

『Yes. Actually there are some people from the Adventurer's Guild looking for Ainz-sama.』

"…If it is about last night's events, please ask them to wait for a moment… No, that can't be. It should be about something else, correct?"

『Yes! Ainz-sama truly is perceptive!』

At this point Narberal became vague, her silence expressed her confusion. Before long, as if she had reached a conclusion in her mind, she spoke again: 『Actually, apart from that event, another problem has arisen. That is… Related to a vampire.』

"What? You said vampire?" Ainz turned his eyes towards the 'Crystal Monitor', focusing on Shalltear who was still standing upright rigidly. "About that vampire, has the other side mentioned anything? For example silver hair, or wearing a crimson armor and the like?"

『Nothing unfortunately. The one who came to find Ainz-sama was merely running an errand. The other side only said that other details would be explained at the Adventurer's Guild, and hope that Ainz-sama could head there as soon as possible. I heard that several adventurer teams were already there… The Guild member is currently nearby, what should I convey to him?』 Ainz shut his eyes. Of course there were no eyeballs, only the light in his eye-sockets vanished.

"About Narberal's 'Message', what is your view on this Albedo?" After the explanation, Albedo lowered her eyes, then after a few seconds looked back at Ainz. "Under the current situation without sufficient information, regardless of whichever option is chosen, both have advantages and disadvantages. It should be decided by Ainz-sama's personal preferences. Personally, I believe that it does not matter if we ignore those humans."

After Ainz expressed gratitude to Albedo, he slipped into deep thought. Taking Shalltear as the first priority, it may end up unravelling into the worst case scenario. If the Adventurer's Guild was taken as the first priority, what kinds of changes in development would Shalltear's situation have? Thinking from the worst possible outcome, he felt that no matter which decision was made, it would still evolve into the worst situation.

At this instant if he still had his companions, it would be easy to decide by majority vote. However, they were not around. As the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, and claiming such an important name for himself, he alone had to make a decision. After a moment of hesitation, Ainz made his conclusion, "Albedo, send people to monitor Shalltear. I will take a trip to E-Rantel's Adventurer's Guild. After this matter is concluded, take me to Shalltear's location."

"As you command."

"You heard that, Narberal?"

『Yes. Then this subordinate shall inform the messenger that you will be heading there.』

"Ah yes, tell him like that. With that Albedo, sorry but I shall be heading to the Adventurer's Guild."

"Understood. I shall follow the instructions and send a few servants out."

"Sorry for troubling you. And I will be giving my ring to Yuri, please keep it safe for me." Actually, there was also something else he wished to give to the chief librarian, but Ainz felt there was no time left to spare and immediately activated the ring's transfer ability.

The two sisters were left alone in the room, and the atmosphere relaxed. As if waiting for this moment, Nigredo's lidless eyes flashed with curiosity. "What is it? What's going on with Shalltear?"

"Ah, she seems to have rebelled."

"…Unbelievable… How could this be possible… Really?"

"I can't believe it either, but that's how it is."

"Then quickly getting rid of her would do. But looking at the way things are, it seems that Ainz-sama does not wish for that to happen?"

"Yes, because Ainz-sama is extremely compassionate… No, it should be because adjudicating her execution before investigating the reason for Shalltear's betrayal could perhaps become a great mistake. Ainz-sama should be thinking along those lines."

"Oh—", Nigredo let out a subtle sound which could have meant agreement or could have been denial. "I understand now. I'll keep surveying Shalltear with magic until your servants gather and start their watch. "Apologies for the inconvenience, elder sister."

Believing the conversation was over, just as Albedo was about to release the ring's ability, she felt that her elder sister still had something she wished to say. Normally, the elder sister was the type to speak straightforwardly. There was only one reason which would cause her to hesitate. Although she didn't want to, if there was a chance that the topic was something other than what she thought it was, then it was necessary to ask her regardless.

"What is it, elder sister?"

"…Since I'm not allowed to leave this frozen prison, I'm not too clear about what's happening outside. Is Spinel still well?" …So it was that after all. Albedo thought this to herself, and regretted asking. However with an unwavering tone befitting this question she asked: "Elder sister, you still call the girl by that name…"

"I extremely despise that girl, even if we are all the creations of Tabula Smaragdina-sama… No, the way Spinel was created was different from the way we were. She is definitely not the type that others can open their hearts towards."

"That's not true, elder sister. She is quite adorable."

"The way I see it, you have been deceived by her. Spinel will definitely bring a great calamity to Nazarick, I guarantee it."

"…About this viewpoint, we shall forever share different opinions. I believe that girl would never become a scourge."

"Is that so? If you… The Overseer of the Guardians have decided like this, then I won't say anything more. However, I still hope that you, as keeper of the Guardians, will bear my concerns firmly in mind."

"Got it, I'll be sure to remember."

Holding back an emotional sigh, Albedo transferred to another location. However, while she would normally laugh it off, today her words became lodged in her heart like a thorn. She believed that the Supreme Ruler's creations were all utterly devoted. However, Shalltear still rebelled. This meant that others could turn to betrayal as well. Maybe, younger sister's betrayal was also possible—

She could not completely erase this possibility. However, for Albedo, this was not a bad thing. At the transfer destination, Albedo arrived with trance-like misty eyes. "Ainz-sama, my beloved, I am your faithful dog, your slave." Towards the absent man she expressed her true thoughts. "Even if all of Nazarick were to turn against you, I would still stand by your side."

Part 3

"Come, come, come, Momon-san, please find an empty seat." There were six men in the room, three of whom were fully armed and ferocious-looking men. Another man, though also mighty

and majestic but unarmed, stood up and welcomed Ainz. There was another thin and neurotic-looking man wearing a robe. The last was an obese man in the innermost corner of the room.

After Ainz sat down with everyone's gaze upon him, the man standing up immediately opened his mouth again. "Let me introduce myself then. I am the leader of this city's Adventurers' Guild, Pluton Ainzack." This middle-aged man looked quite capable and vigorous. Exuding the atmosphere of a veteran of a hundred battles, there should be nobody who would question him being an outstanding warrior.

"This is the mayor, Panasolei Guruze Dale Rettenmaier-san." After Ainz slightly nodded, Panasolei lightly waved his hand in response. Obese… No, to be honest, basically his entire body was fat. His belly was a mass of bloated fatty oil, and even his chin consisted of excessive fat. Because it was covered with fat, his face looked like that of an unremarkable obese bulldog. The hair on his scalp was already thin enough to reflect light, and the remaining hair had already turned white. "Momon-san, pleased to meet you." Perhaps it was due to a stuffy nose, but when he spoke he would let out a fueee noise. Ainz once again nodded in acknowledgement to this fat, piggish man.

"This person is E-Rantel's Magician Guild President Theo Lachesil." The man was extremely thin, like bamboo. While giving off a nervous disposition, the man nodded towards Ainz. "Like you, these three men were invited to join us. They are all representatives from three of E-Rantel's adventurer teams that we take pride in. From the right to the left is Kuragura's representative Igavaruji-san, Sky Wolf's representative Berette-san, and Rainbow's representative Mokunaku-san."

The postures of these three men were magnificent and gave off the impression of strength, befitting the color — mithril — of the metal that hung around their necks. Although the equipment they wore was certainly trash for Ainz, for the adventurers of this city it was relatively much better.

Each person's eyes carried a different emotion, but one common sentiment between all of them was curiosity. One of them, Kuragura's representative Igavaruji, glared with sharp eyes at the seated Ainz and asked coldly: "Before this, there is something I would like to inquire about, guild leader Ainzack. I have never heard of the name Momon. Since he is of mithril rank, he should have accomplished some feats before right? Just what has he done?"

Although his tone carried a little hostility, Ainzack, who seemed to not notice, cheerfully responded: "His feats include taming the Virtuous King of the Forest, and resolving the cemetery incident last night."

"The cemetery incident?" Differing from the confused Igavaruji, the adventurer team Rainbow's representative Mokunaku let out a gasp. "Could it be the incident involving the large number of undead?"

"Fueee, you are quite well informed. That news was quite troublesome, that is why orders have already been issued requesting no leaking of this information. Where did you hear about it from?"

Whether or not due to nasal congestion, a fueee noise would often be heard during his speeches. It could also be because he used his mouth to breathe that his tone had almost no cadence. It felt a

little strange, like he was reciting a play script word for word. “Apologies mayor. I also heard little about it, and truth be told it is difficult to answer your question of the source from where it was overheard. On top of that, I do not know of any more details.” As their eyes clashed, both men smiled. Mokunaku had a false smile whilst the mayor had a wry smile.

“Fueee, sounds like a lie, but so be it. There should be plenty of people who know about the undead incident anyways. Fuee, sorry, I’ve unintentionally interrupted.”

“It doesn’t matter mayor. As such the Guild has concluded its judgment and believes that Momon-san is qualified to be a mithril rank adventurer.”

“Just for that? Because he solved one incident? What about the adventurers who went through the advancement tests and rose step-by-step? Won’t they hold a grudge?” The bare minimum of politeness demonstrated towards Ainzack earlier had completely disappeared as Igavaruji openly revealed hostile intent. At that moment, another cold voice joined from the side.

“Hey guild leader, explain it clearly. To be honest, I share his sentiment. I don’t agree with Momon-san’s mithril rank.” The one who interrupted from the side was the Magician’s Guild leader, Lachesil. He had a mocking expression on his face, but then Ainz understood that expression was in fact not directed at himself, but at Igavaruji. However, the man himself did not seem to recognize this and Igavaruji showed a friendly smile towards Lachesil.

“Between the Magician Guild’s President and I, great minds think alike.”

“Ho, ho ho.” As if hearing something hilarious, Lachesil’s thin lips curved to become even thinner. This wasn’t an expression of good will, because his eyes clearly showed his contempt. “Is that so? I feel that your view and my view are as different as night and day.”

“What do you mean by this—”

“It’s true, don’t argue Igavaruji-san. Some in the Guild even reckon that Momon-san should be orichalcum rank.”

“What!” Igavaruji’s face showed plain disbelief.

Seeing that expression, Lachesil entire face twisted in a smile. “With only two people, Momon-san, no, including the Virtuous King of the Forest, the three of them broke through thousands of undead, and defeated the individuals in the middle of carrying out an evil ritual.”

“Something like that is simple if you’re stealthy enough!” Lachesil dramatically sighed and said: “What you say is indeed correct. If I thought it was just that, then Momon-san would still not be orichalcum rank. However a certain set of undead bones revealed Momon-san’s true strength.”

After Lachesil said these words, he looked with solemn eyes at Ainz who was wearing dark armor. “…Skeletal Dragon bones. Momon-san killed a terrifying undead with absolute defence against magic.”

“That, that…! An S-Skeletal Dragon is indeed very powerful! But then, even mithril rank adventurers are able to def—”

“Defeat two at the same time?”

“What!” The gasps came not only from Igavaruji, but also from the other two adventurers.

Following this, the way the two men looked at Ainz appeared to have undergone a slight change, as if trying to gauge the depth of his skills. “The remains of two Skeletal Dragons were left on the scene. Within such a short amount of time, would your teams be able to break through thousands of undead, exterminate two Skeletal Dragons and kill the instigators, preventing them from setting their scheme in motion? Amongst the adventurers who headed towards the cemetery, there were even some who witnessed wraiths, the twisted souls of the departed, and other powerful undead.” Igavaruji wordlessly bit his lip.

“Let me ask you another question. Allegedly, apart from Momon-san there was also a woman in his team. That young woman was a magic caster. Against Skeletal Dragons, which have absolute immunity against magic, she could only be said to be quite powerless. In this kind of situation, if you likewise only had two people… No, including the Virtuous King of the Forest, three people, would it be enough to accomplish that kind of feat?”

Lachesil gave Ainz a respectful bow: “As one of the representatives of this city, I express my heartfelt gratitude to Momon-san. If it wasn’t for your swift response, who knows how many lives would have been sacrificed. I would like to express my personal gratitude, if you should require anything, you only need to say it and I shall do whatever possible to assist.”

“You flatter me, Magician Guild President. I was only accepting Bareare-san’s commission and resolved the problem, that’s all.”

“Ho ho ho ho…” Lachesil laughed loudly, one filled with admiration.

“Sure enough you deserve orichalcum… No, you could even be called adamantite rank. To accomplish such a feat with a small group, and to be so humble about it, even making it sound like a regular routine. I heard that your companion is able to use magic up to the 3rd tier… That can’t be true right?”

“I am delighted by your praise… But, I do not wish to show my cards so easily.”

“Is that so, that really is a shame.”

As Ainz and Lachesil joked, their attitude angered Igavaruji and he loudly yelled out: “My team would’ve been able to handle it if we had been there! In the first place, having such few members is his own problem! It must be because of some defect in his character that he was unable to gather many members!” The room’s atmosphere became tense.

As if to cool down the heat, an out-of-tune fueee sounded out. “Let’s end this discussion here. Everyone here didn’t gather in order to argue amongst yourselves, right?” Hearing the last fueee sound, Igavaruji sat down deflated. However he still held eyes full of angst against Ainz. To this appearance, the two Guild Leaders reluctantly shook their heads.

“I can understand the feelings of those who value strength, but this is not the main issue at this time. We’d better resolve the question quickly, alright?”

“Mayor, thank you.”

“Ah? Although I do not know why you wish to thank me, please continue. Truth be told I’m not too clear either about what is going on.”

“Very well. If it could be immediately reported then, it would have been better…”

“Don’t worry about it. I was also busy at the time dealing with a matter relating to Stronoff-san.” Another fueee sounded out.

“Then, addressing the main point—”

“Before that, at least some basic etiquette is needed. Shouldn’t you take off your helmet?” With an ironic tone, Igavaruji once again interrupted. Even if it were justified, it was still aggravating, and the other adventurers almost frowned. “It doesn’t matter, what he said this time is correct, I have indeed been disrespectful.” But when Ainz calmly removed his helmet, he revealed a fake face created with magic. The appearance was ordinary, not that of a handsome man.

“Because I come from a foreign country, in order to avoid trouble, I’ve been wearing my helmet. Please forgive my rudeness.”

“Che, a foreigner.”

“Give it a rest, Igavaruji. Adventurers who protect mankind from the threat of monsters are not divided by country boundaries. Your outspoken complaints against the guild’s unwritten rules since its inception truly makes me ashamed as a fellow adventurer.” Just as Igavaruji was about to interrupt with another rebuke, he realized everyone present shared the same opinion, so he reluctantly remained quiet.

“…Because I am an outsider, being treated with prejudice has been commonplace.” Ainz’ statement made several people smile wryly. Igavaruji’s face changed color out of anger, but when Ainz once again wore his helmet, there were no more complaints. “Well then, I hope there are no more complications on that topic. I wish to immediately tackle the main issue.”

“Because someone was late, I have yet to hear the contents.”

“I am very sorry about this, please forgive me.” Ainz lowered his head in a genuine apology.

When he was an office worker, he often had similar experiences where meetings would only begin after the boss declared that all members were present, and as a result he was had to suppress his urge to go home. Because of that he was truly able to relate to their feelings. With his frank and honest apology, in stark contrast to the constantly cynical and sarcastic Igavaruji, Ainz came out to be nobler. A sigh sounded out, causing Igavaruji’s face to become more repulsive, because he understood that his own self-evaluation had reached a new low.

However there was one person even more livid than Igavaruji. “…Enough of this. If there are more interruptions, get out of here.” That person was of course Ainzack. With his eyes full of anger and not even half of the steadiness in his voice as earlier, the one he glared at was of course Igavaruji. Igavaruji gently bowed his head in apology. Seeing the other side’s candid movement, Ainz was puzzled. From the hostility shown towards himself, it would not be surprising if at this

moment Igavaruji were to display an attitude similar to the rebellious nature of middle school students towards their parents.

Why then would he withdraw now? After a brief moment of thought, Ainz arrived at a hypothetical conclusion. At this gathering of mithril ranked adventurers, if one person was kicked out, what kind of criticisms would he provoke? Even if the truth was let out, there would still be the possibility that others would think he was chased out because he was worthless. With this, his position amongst adventurers would plummet. This should be the reason why he shut his mouth.

"First a brief report. About two nights ago, adventurers patrolling the roads on the outskirts of E-Rantel came across a vampire. Of these adventurers who met the vampire, five were killed. Everyone's gathering this time is because of this." After listening to the description of the vampire's appearance, Ainz' hopes were easily shattered. Due to being too afraid, the surviving adventurer only vaguely remembered the vampire's outfit, hair color and appearance.

However, what remained was the strong impression of a 'silver haired and large mouth'. Even if they only had a vague recollection of its appearance, anyone who knew Shalltear and overheard this would quickly connect it with her. In his heart Ainz was already certain of who the vampire was. *I don't know how the situation turned out like this, but I should better alter the memories of those survivors. This isn't good, I have to quickly find an opportunity.* As Ainz furrowed his illusionary eyebrows, the discussion continued.

"So that's how it is. I'm not too clear on this incident either, but then explaining solely for my sake would be too much a waste of everyone's time, therefore if there is another opportunity please allow me to listen, and I shall come ask you if I have any further questions."

"Understood. Then everybody, are there any questions?"

"Where is the concerned area?"

"Beyond the city's northern gate, you can find a large forest after walking for three hours. It's just inside that forest."

"What rank were those adventurers?"

"Iron rank."

"…Please tell me, is it only because of a vampire that so many adventurers have been gathered? Are we intended to use a bidding approach for this?"

"That's right, if it is vampires, platinum rank adventurers should be sufficient to handle it. Right? I absolutely don't understand why so many mithril rank adventurers were called."

"The reason is simple, that vampire is very powerful." Lachesil interrupted with his answer, and everyone showed surprise as they looked at him.

"A very powerful vampire…?"

"Could you mean that the opponent is a higher class vampire… The one who appeared in the tale of the thirteen heroes, the vampire lord 'Landfall'?"

"We don't know whether or not the opponent is that vampire lord, but when the adventurers encountered the vampire, the opponent used the 3rd tier spell 'Create Undead'. What this means, I shouldn't have to explain to you adventurers right?" There was nothing more to say. Not only that, their stiff expressions spoke volumes.

"Well… I absolutely do not understand what it means. Can you explain it to me?"

"I am really sorry, Mayor."

"Being able to use magic of that kind of realm, if we were to make a simple evaluation, we can treat the opponent as having platinum rank capability." Panasolei who roughly understood this explanation frowned. "That also goes to say… I will stop talking in such a way." The light in Panasolei's eyes sharpened, this was one of the changes that the others felt. From the lazy, sloth-like expression just now, it became a savage wild boar expression. No, this was Panasolei's true appearance.

"In other words, Magician Guild President, your meaning is as such: a monster with the strength rivalling a platinum rank team, has skills that match a platinum rank team as well."

"What you say is correct."

"So simply put, it just got stronger?"

"Thinking about it in this way isn't wrong either."

"If we consider in terms of military strength, what is the equivalent?"

"Military… This question is rather difficult."

Lachesil was vexed for a moment, then spoke, "This is roughly my personal way of viewing this. I should say this first, this view is not absolute. If we take the opponent as an army for evaluation, undead do not tire or require food… Grudgingly I'd say it should be equivalent to about an army size of ten thousand."

"What did you say!" Hearing this conclusion, Panasolei let out a shocked expression, as if seeking the opinions of the other adventurers. Apart from Ainz, the others nodded in agreement with the Magician Guild President's statement.

Ainzack opened his mouth to indicate "I will continue from what Theo said—", and as if receiving the baton from Lachesil he proceeded to say: "Generally speaking, approximately twenty percent of the country's adventurers are above platinum ranking. Within the Kingdom there are about three thousand adventurers, therefore in all of the Kingdom's lands which consists of more than eight million inhabitants, there are only around six hundred adventurers of platinum ranking or above. Do you understand this? Adventurers of platinum rank or higher are that rare."

"If it's like this, even if I do not wish to understand, I already have. Then to counter this situation, I would like to ask you adventurers. Do you have the confidence to go ahead with the subjugation? If there is no way… How about seeking the assistance of Warrior-Captain Gazef-san?"

Gazef Stronoff, the Kingdom's most powerful warrior, exceeding adamantite rank adventurers. He could be considered the Kingdom's final trump card. However, Ainzack immediately denied this. "Indeed, perhaps no warrior is able to defeat Stronoff-san. However in a situation where Stronoff-san faced off against an adventurer team weaker than him, the victor would be the adventurer team. This is because the adventurer team would have different methods of attacking, taking Stronoff-san for example, the amount of magic and martial skills used by the adventurer team would be four times that of Stronoff-san. Against a monster possessing special abilities, the truth is that this difference is enormous."

"Well…"

"The best policy is to gather adamantite rank and orichalcum rank adventurers. Before that, let us first allow this city's best adventurers to build a defensive net to stop the vampire's invasion."

"Wouldn't this method be too passive?"

"Considering the worst possible development, this should be the best strategy. After all, isn't the opponent a single person who is able to rival an entire army?"

"With a fighting power able to take on huge number of troops, scenes of terror in all sorts of places would appear… I honestly do not wish to imagine this happening." If the opponent was an army of ten thousand, their location could be easily determined from the marching.

Also, to maintain such a large army, it would be necessary to prepare a large amount of rations, making it difficult to carry out a long-term siege. But then, if it were a single person situation, how would this change? What's more, if it were a person able to use different types of 'Invisibility' magic, specializing in covert actions?

"However, about the Guild Leader's opinion, speaking as an adventurer I say that establishing a defensive net is a very difficult task. This is because in order to harmonize each other's movements, long-term training is necessary…"

"No need for that, it is enough if everyone is able to fight together. What do you think fellow gentlemen?" The adventurers immediately raised objections to the mayor's suggestion.

"It should not be possible. If we are to have a tacit arrangement for action, then it is necessary to devise of a tight-knit operational plan. But the more detailed the plan is, the more likely it is for mistakes to occur when unexpected situations arise. If it is like that, everyone acting by themselves instead of together might even be better. Speaking of which, why has the vampire appeared in that place? What has the Guild's investigation come up with?"

"In this regard, because the opponent is a powerful vampire, the guild has no means to investigate finer details. Just as we were about to assemble an investigation group, the incident last night occurred, and our manpower was dispersed there."

"…So that's how it is. Are you concerned that these two incidents are related?"

"That is true."

"Wasn't the matter in the cemetery resolved by Momon-san? From the remains and relics of the first incident's instigators was there anything to suggest a connection between the two incidents?"

This question made the place fall into a brief silence. Ainz was puzzled. Before this the Guild Leader never hesitated in answering, yet for the first time his eyesight slightly turned towards the mayor. It was an asking-for-permission look. Just thinking about it a little, this could be related information to a terrorist attack against the city, and it was possible that some information but not all could be told to the adventurers.

"From the relics we gathered that the opponent was Zuranon." The three adventurer's expressions turned serious. But for Ainz, this was the first time he had heard of this name. He could not help praying to a god he didn't even believe in, hoping that he wouldn't be asked about things he knew nothing about. *Ignorance is frightening. I must gather intelligence as fast as possible.*

"The secret organization which deals with controlling the undead. Then it must be related to the vampire."

"Problems arising at the same time both inside and outside the city… Is the objective to divide our fighting force? Or both are diversions, and the real plan is about to commence… This would be too disastrous."

"The priority of the task at hand should be to conduct reconnaissance. According to the ranger's reports, there's supposedly a bandit's den close to the location where the vampire had been discovered…"

"The possibility that the vampire has already left that place is high… But then again, the possibility of it still remaining there is not zero. People should be sent there first…" The adventurer who was speaking suddenly stopped talking.

It was only a natural reaction, because heading into the most likely place to find the vampire for an investigation was tantamount to agreeing to jump into the most dangerous place. If there actually was an encounter, and if the vampire possessed the predicted battle prowess, it would be certain death. The remarks just now was no different to politely asking someone to go to their death.

"…Let us put this aside for now. It is still more urgent to strengthen the city defenses first, because perhaps the vampire has already at this moment snuck inside the city."

"…It is an easy feat to sneak inside the city just by using magic. This place is not like the Empire's capital with sky cavalry and magic casters patrolling everywhere." It was possible to use 'Flight' to enter the city from the sky, and it was also possible to use 'Invisibility' to invade from the front. Magic was that troublesome, therefore concentrating combat power and putting it into defence first was a very natural idea.

"But then it will be incredibly difficult to deal with a situation without any sort of intelligence, therefore the cave should still be investigated first!" This extremely reasonable proposal gathered the collected approval of everyone present. This kind of situation was not favorable for Ainz. It would be extremely disastrous if Shalltear's current appearance was known by others. Although it was uncertain why future developments there would be beyond today, if Shalltear's current

appearance was well-known throughout the city, even the Kingdom, then it could become a great obstacle to behind-the-scenes operations in the future.

Ainz thought desperately, but saw no other method to divert the course of events towards another direction. In the end there was only one method which would prevent Shalltear's appearance from being leaked out. Ainz swallowed his saliva he couldn't have secreted, and said: "First, there has been a misconception. The vampire and Zuranon are unrelated."

"Why? Momon-san, do you have some insider information?"

"I know that vampire's name, because that vampire is the one I have been chasing to kill all this time."

"What?" The atmosphere in the room shook.

Ainz overclocked his brain thinking, in mental preparation for the main event that was about to start. "That is an extremely powerful vampire. My true objective of becoming an adventurer was to obtain information on them." This was deliberately spread intelligence so that Ainzack would immediately take up the bait. "Them? Momon-san, you said them?"

"Yes, two vampires, of which the silver haired female vampire's name is…"

He suddenly stopped here. Originally he was about to say Carmilla, but female vampires going by that name was just too common. If there were any players around, this name would let them detect his own existence. At the moment he hesitated in deciding what name, he suddenly got a stroke of inspiration, and blurted out a name. "Henupenuty."

"Hah?" He heard a stupefied question. However it was not just one person, but almost everyone in unison. "…It's Honyopenyoko." Although it was a name he said himself, it felt like it was said differently from just now. If anyone questioned on this point, he intended to insist that he pronounced it wrong earlier.

"Henupenu…?"

"It's Honyopenyoko." Although he changed the female vampire's name's last syllable to "-ko", just from this name itself, no Yggdrasil players should be able to detect that it was a name he had come up with. Ainz felt full of confidence in this perfect name, and smiled proudly under his helmet. "Is, is that so? Then that Henu… Whatever! Since we know that female vampire's name… Isn't it about time for us to know your true identity? Which country are you from?"

"Very sorry, now is still not the right time. I am charged with carrying out a secret mission. If you were to find out, I will have to leave your country, and the vampire will be yours to deal with. I do not wish to allow the matter to become a country-to-country situation. Mayor, you should understand this right?" The mayor nodded slowly. Seeing this motion, Ainzack clenched his lips and glared sharply at Ainz.

The Guild Leader's glare did not bother Ainz in the slightest, but to what extent would they believe his lie? Were there any contradictions? Ainz was unsettled by these two concerns, but pushing this restlessness aside, with a tone of anger not permitting others to intervene Ainz continued to speak: "Let my team be responsible for the reconnaissance. If we discover the

vampires there, we shall exterminate them on site." The dark warrior who arrived late decisively declared as such. Although they could not see his face, they could clearly feel his confidence and determination from the tone of his voice.

Pressure, making others mistaken that it was in fact the air itself shaking, cause people to let out a gasp. All of the people present thought it was themselves which made that noise. "T-Then, the other teams—"

"Unnecessary. I do not need any hindering burdens." He interrupted the other's proposal, gently waving his hand to indicate this. This rude announcement was made with an arrogant attitude. Facing adventurers of the same rank, such demeanor was inappropriate. However, the adventurers present who had experienced hundreds of battles felt that this attitude was not borne from narcissism, pride or arrogance, but from cold calculation. At the same time he was also able to make such an assertion on the basis of his true strength.

This man was extraordinary. It felt as if the dark armor was expanding in front of their eyes, the growing feeling of oppression, even the room had the illusion of becoming narrower. From this man they sensed an aura whom they would forever not be able to catch up with, for example that felt from an adamantite rank adventurer. This fellow could be called a hero. Ainzack who could not resist remaining silent, took several deep breaths. No, every person present did the same motion, and the mayor was even sweating, loosening his collar.

As if whispering, Ainzack asked softly: "What about payment?"

"It is fine if this issue is discussed at a later time. However, until the completion of this incident… After the vampires are discovered to be exterminated, I hope to at least be able to obtain orichalcum rank, so that when searching for the other vampire, my actions will be smoother, because having to prove my strength is troublesome." Suddenly all of the persons present made an understanding noise.

Adventurers neither work for cities nor countries, nonetheless until this date this city had never had an orichalcum rank adventurer. If he became this city's highest ranking adventurer he would probably earn a lot of attention and reputation. Moreover, being able to give the rare blessing of orichalcum rank would make this reputation spread further. Like this there would be more coming to be entrusted with highly dangerous missions, which would in turn increase the chances of receiving news on powerful vampires.

However, even if it could be accepted rationally, there was one man who couldn't accept it on an emotional level. A chair creaked. Looking towards the source of the sound, it need not be said. Of course it was the one who kept picking a bone with Ainz… Igavaruji. "I cannot completely trust you. S-Speaking of which, it isn't certain either that the vampire is actually that powerful! Even if there was magic used to control zombies, it could have been through the use of items. I wish to go too!"

Even after being shocked, Igavaruji was still able to object, all because he held unsatisfied hostile intent against Ainz, unwilling to admit to the extent of Ainz' true strength. Perhaps it was displeasure towards his fellow adventurer's attitude, Berette said in a prickly tone: "Igavaruji, your attitude—"

“No problem.” Ainz very simply agreed. However this was not out of well-meaning, since the following words were extremely cold. “However, if you come along… Certain death? I do not know whether it will be a complete elimination.” It was an extremely rational tone, not threatening nor joking. It was spoken like he was decisively announcing to others his foreboding fate, causing Igavaruji to shudder. No, not only Igavaruji, but also all persons present felt as if they were encased by a cold biting wind.

Ainz gently shrugged: “I’ve already given my warning. If you still do not mind then come along.”

“O-Of course!” Although it was a bluff, he would not back down here, not like this. As a fellow adventurer of the same rank, how could he lose face in front of those who held the power in this city. Just as the two were butting heads, Ainzack who had regained his composure a little asked Ainz: “Self-confidence is good, but how can you be so confident? Of course we are all too clear about your exceeding strength, but from the evaluation of the opponent’s strength, you should also know that this task is not that easy. We are also concerned whether to entrust everything to you to handle. If… In the unlikely event that you are defeated, we also need to have a fallback planned out…”

Like a gunshot, Ainz immediately replied: “I have a trump card.”

“What is it?” Ainz took out a crystal from his bosom as a reply to the interested Ainzack. “…Can’t be that! Impossible, hard to believe…” The one who suddenly yelled out was Lachesil. Panting, he continued: “I have often seen this in precious ancient books… Supposedly the Theocracy had one of that kind, hailed as a treasure… A magic item holding enormous power. This is one of that kind… A sealed magic crystal. Why would you have such a rare item!?”

“Really amazing… You’re right. And sealed inside the crystal is an 8th tier spell.”

“I must've misheard! What did you say!”

Ainz’ reply made Lachesil let out a cry, one so strange that even a chicken being slaughtered would not make such a noise. His facial expression had also contorted to the point it was quite terrifying. The ones caught by surprise weren’t just Lachesil but also all those present, no, apart from the mayor, everybody let out a stunned expression out of astonishment and fear. Even adventurers with little experience would be able to understand the meaning of Ainz’ words and the value of that item.

“…8th tier… That must be a concocted fabrication right?”

“…Perhaps it is a fantasy, but if it is that magic of that realm… Really it is at the realm of myths.”

“Are you kidding? That is nonsense!” The three adventurers — even Igavaruji — displayed a look of fear, staring at the crystal on the dark gauntlet without peeling their eyes away. “Apologies in advance! T-That item, may I borrow it for a second?”

“Why?”

“That… Simply for the sake of a magic caster’s interest. I swear I will not make any strange movements! If you need anything as collateral, I can give all items on my body to you, for example this belt—”

Seeing Lachesil who was already frantically removing his belt without finishing his speech, Ainz who slightly couldn't bear this responded: "I know, there is no such need. Please have a look, here you go."

"Sorry, may I also touch it?"

"Then I want too!" The sealed magic crystal was fumbled and passed around through many pairs of hands until it finally landed Lachesil's hands. He who was the last to touch it, stared at it with misty eyes, like a woman who obtained her long sought after, precious jewel. No, perhaps it was even like a youth who had obtained a desired item.

"Too beautiful… Right, Momon-san, may I cast magic on it?" Seeing Ainz wave his hand in agreement, Lachesil delightedly activated the magic. "「Appraise Magic Item」, 「Detect Enchant」." Activating two types of magic, the man's expression gradually became exaggerated, followed by, "Incredible!"

The masculinity exuded earlier was completely gone. With innocent eyes, sparkling with pure delight, and also a different tone of voice, he looked like an overjoyed teenager. "It's true! Sealed inside is indeed a spell of the 8th tier! My magic is only able to see this little… But it is already magnificent, too magnificent!" He was continuously howling like he was a lunatic, stunning everyone present at the scene. The next movement Lachesil made was to take the crystal, licking it all over, then rubbing it against his cheek, it was simply crazy behavior.

"C-Calm down! What are you doing!" Frightened by his friend who was not the type to show such mad behavior, Ainzack stood up and got closer to Lachesil. In fact, everybody looked upon him with either amazed or insufferable eyes. For a man holding a key position in this city to do such an action, it was just too difficult to see. "Bastard! How can I calm down? This is just too magnificent! Sealed inside here really is an 8th tier! Although there is no way to know what kind of spell it is!"

Lachesil could not hold in his excitement, gazing at the crystal with shining eyes. Soon he finally regained a little rationality, and asked Ainz: "Momon-san! W-Where was this crystal found? Tell me quickly!"

"It was found in some ruins, at the same time as many other items were discovered. Of course the magic was already sealed inside this crystal at the time. I've already had several great magic casters determine this."

"So it's like that! W-Where are these ruins?"

"In a very faraway place… That's all I can tell you." Of course, this answer of Ainz made Lachesil clench his lips in regret.

"Well, isn't it about time to return it to me?"

"Woo…ooo." Lachesil looked all around, and reluctantly returned the sealed magic crystal to Ainz. Squinting while he watched Ainz pick up parchment to wipe the crystal, Lachesil shouted out loudly: "Back to the main topic, I… Object to Momon-san going ahead to exterminate the vampire!"

A surprised silence enveloped the scene. Ainzack covered his face with his palm, but just to be certain, asked with a bitter expression: "…Why this sudden objection? Although the reason is obvious even without asking, I'm still asking tentatively."

"Well… Because… Because it would be too great of a waste…"

Absolutely crazy. Ainzack determined his friend's current mental state to be such, and ignored him completely. "Well then, we can ignore Lachesil's opinion…"

"One moment! The 8th tier really is magic in the mythical realm. Such a priceless item will be used on a mere vampire!" Anger surfaced on Ainzack's eyes. It was already intolerance beyond words, not an attitude that one in a high position ought to have. Ainzack repressed his wrath and told Lachesil in a level voice: "…Sorry, Lachesil. Really, don't make a scene anymore."

The strong emotions implicit in this sentence pulled Lachesil back into rationality and speechlessness. His face was flushed red because of his shameful actions earlier. Squinting to confirm that his friend was once again back to normality, Ainzack did his best to remain calm as he made an official request: "…Well, Momon-san, I shall entrust all of this to you."

Seeing the other side bow as he made this request, Ainz nodded full of confidence. "Understood." After saying this sentence, he looked through the slit in his helmet at Igavaruji. "We will be immediately departing immediately, since a vampire's penalty under sunlight is slowed movement."

"Penalty? Hey, it's their weakness. Indeed, their actions would be slower. I can be prepared in a short amount of time on my side."

"…No need to discuss this with your companions?"

"Not a problem. They would understand."

"…Is that so. Well then, meet you at the E-Rantel's main gate in an hour."

"An hour? Would it be too early? There is still plenty of time before sunset."

"I want to rush over there quickly. If you reckon that your courage is lacking, and need some time to steady your resolve, then I will leave you here and go by myself. Do you have anything to say?"

"Got it, I'll immediately start preparing." He spoke in a clear and loud voice, making Igavaruji give a straightforward agreement and subsequently got up. Ainz coldly looked at Igavaruji's departing back then turned to survey the crowd remaining in the room.

"Then I shall immediately depart. I hope that the others are able to protect E-Rantel well. I don't wish to find a prickly situation when I return not having encountered the vampire."

"Ah, although we cannot guarantee that there will be completely no problems, but we will do our very best. If you encounter danger, please retreat as well." Ainz nodded then left the room.

There were three people left behind in room: Panasolei, Ainzack and Lachesil who was portraying a longing expression. "Allowing everyone to see my embarrassing appearance, I am really sorry."

“Not really, relax.” Panasolei had a wry smile as he replied to Lachesil’s apology. However, everyone’s evaluation of Lachesil had significantly changed. Lachesil himself also felt quite useless. But even so, he still found it difficult to conceal his look of exhilaration.

Before, when he had encountered the pharmacist Lizzie, she was animatedly discussing the matter with the potion. Seeing that jubilant appearance, with cold eyes Lachesil himself had questioned whether it was necessary to be so overjoyed about that kind of thing.

Right now he was filled with the urge to laugh at the feelings he had at that time. He understood. When something appeared in front of his eyes which he could not possibly obtain, anyone would find it hopeless to repress their heart’s amazement and touched emotions.

“Was the item precious to that degree?” Lachesil was silent for a moment. That was to repress the teenager-like emotion that surfaced earlier. “Yes. That item could have significantly overturned all past knowledge and everything magic-related. In truth, magic beyond the 6th tier is only legend. However, that just now was the first time I had witnessed it.”

Different types of magic called ‘magic tiers’ supposedly first appeared in this world six hundred or five hundred years ago. Although afterwards several magic casters appeared which were hailed as heroes, but of those heroes who were able to use 7th tier magic and above, apart from The Thirteen Heroes, the others were rumors.

Amongst hero legends, there was a hero which used a magic which made others wish to decisively say that “it couldn’t be done even if you use spells above the 7th tier”. But it was generally agreed that it was a story without evidence? Also whether the thirteen heroes actually cast 7th tier magic and above was also dubious. But then—

Lachesil thought to himself, perhaps not all of those hero tales were fiction. He put this event firmly in his heart, and told himself to remember investigating this in his free time. For example, wielding the ‘Branch of Tonelico’, the goblin king who destroyed countless dragons; the winged hero able to soar in the sky for a long period of time; the magic warrior riding a Tri-headed Dragon; and the princess who, along with her twelve loyal knights, ruled over the Crystal Palace, among others.

“Well, can we trust him completely?” The one Panasolei was talking about, was without doubt Ainz. A potion taken from the hand of an adventurer wearing black armor, and throwing this vial of potion against the vampire to make the opponent retreat, this was the testimony of the surviving adventurers.

Therefore they came to this city’s most prominent pharmacist Lizzie to enquire about the effects of the potion. The conclusion was that it was an item almost as rare as the sealed magic crystal just now. If there was only one rare item, others would feel suspicious, but if there were two, others would want to know who crafted it. But then, why did the vampire stop its attack?

There were two possibilities. The first was related to enmity, the other was abiding by a mutual alliance. That was why it was necessary to consider the possibility that Momon’s earlier information and this was possibly connected. Momon the adventurer’s sudden appearance along with the vampire, was there really a hostile relationship between the two? “Could he be working

together with the vampire?" This was his area of concern. The three people thought back to the man Momon and what he said earlier.

"This possibility is very low. What do you think Lachesil?"

"I am of the same view. There are better methods if he wants to pretend that he killed the vampire and then send that female vampire into hiding." Even if assuming he was working with the vampire, what Momon said just now would not be to his benefit. "Would his objective be to become an orichalcum rank adventurer?"

"That shouldn't be the case, mayor. Adventurers do enjoy fame and popularity, but it is a long distance from having power. What would be the benefits after becoming orichalcum rank? Ainzack."

"…It would be possible to receive better paid commissioned work, and the reputation would be higher. With luck, it would even be possible to receive an official position with good conditions… However these are pretty much all of the benefits. If he wanted to gain power, other methods would still be faster."

The deep impression that adventurers gave to others was that of professional mercenaries in the business of exterminating monsters. Indeed, perhaps it was possible to become the leader of the Adventurer's Guild, but it would be impossible to climb up to a position able to influence the Kingdom's politics.

"If he wanted money, all he would have to do was sell off that crystal and he would not have to worry about food or clothing for the rest of his life. With strength like his, it would also be possible to inflate his reputation rapidly. In truth, it seems that there are already a portion of the guards who refer to him as a hero from legends."

Panasolei nodded in agreement. Defeating the towering large number of undead in one move, unstoppably breaking through the densely packed countless undead, that act of heroism truly was befitting of being named a genuine hero. This was the word of mouth evaluation of the guards that witnessed Momon's battle heroism. They even swore with their hands on their heart that if only he were present, there was absolutely no need to fear any monster.

"Having said that, or quite unfortunately, there isn't any conclusive evidence which can prove that he is trustworthy. However, Momon-san's rhetoric does not contain any inconsistencies, and furthermore, if he was the enemy why would he take out the sealed magic crystal for us to see? That is why we ought to place our faith in him." Lachesil's words made the other two people show sour faces. It was clearly written on these faces that having seen the maniacal behavior earlier, his opinion was hardly convincing.

"Mayor, Isaac… Both of you don't trust Momon-san's motives because he appeared out of nowhere, and when he did the vampire seemed to do the same, right? However, I believe Momon-san's words were already a sufficient explanation." Both men nodded at the same time, indicating that it was correct.

"There is also the matter of the vampire stopping its assault on the female adventurer upon seeing Momon-san's rare potion. If the vampire was chased all the way here by Momon-san, that also

makes sense. Even more so, the female adventurer did not die, which could also be because the vampire wanted to let Momon-san know of its presence here, and deliberately spared the female adventurer's life."

"So that's how it is… Letting Momon-san believe it was nearby, effectively trapping him here. Because the female adventurer possessed the potion, the vampire figured out that she had a connection with Momon-san and let her go, in order to let the news of her presence disseminate faster. No contradictions…"

"…Considering Momon-san's unrelenting pursuit of that vampire… It is really difficult to feel happy about him coming here."

"Correct mayor. However, although we still do not know which country or of what religion he is from, it is still better to treat him nicely before he defeats the vampire, whilst we also increase our preparations at the same time. Although I personally think that we do not need such suspicion… Ho ho, I really wish to talk about items with Momon-san. That armor seems to be quite valuable as well."

"…Speaking of Momon-san, ah yes mayor, what of Zuranon's corpse?"

"We do not know where they have gone." The mayor answered with a grimace.

The miserable corpses defeated by Ainz were placed in the safe care of the guards, but after daylight, they suddenly disappeared. Although it was speculated that someone invaded and snatched them away, the guards hadn't been attacked and nobody saw any suspicious figures. In order to prevent the transmission of magic, the place was created using a method which blocked the transmission of magic, which could be described as a kind of secret room.

Therefore even the invader's invasion pathway was unknown, and had simply disappeared like a wisp of smoke. There were secret investigations still being carried out inside the city, but no related trails were found. The possibility of finding anything from this point onwards was zero. This also meant to say that any possible connections which could be discovered from the dead bodies had already ceased to exist. "That man who conducted the undead ritual, could he have turned into an undead and escaped?"

"…That possibility cannot be entirely refuted."

"This really is frustrating, and the forensics were not complete… Is the secret shrine under the spirit temple the only thing left that may still have a clue?"

"It would be great if there is any evidence left behind there."

"Hearing you mention this, it seems that Momon-san did not go inside there. If any valuable items of unknown origin are discovered there, can we give it to him?"

"Ah. If those items and their ritual is moved aside, just adhere to the adventurer rules and hand them to Momon-san."

Part 4

Ainz sprinted along the street. Warm air rushed through the helmet's gap, blowing into the spot where his eyes were. If he had eyeballs, perhaps he would be blinking non-stop, but since Ainz lacked organs he only felt that 'some wind was blowing'. Looking down, the ground flew by as fast as an arrow. Maybe it was because the distance from the ground was small, or because of other reasons, but the feeling was faster than the actual speed being travelled at, although having said that it was not terrifying in the least. Every time the body sprung up, like reflex there would be increased strength exerted below the feet.

Despite the fact that Hamsuke was adept at maintaining his balance, apart from the humongous size, it was basically a hamster. It was also quite a difficult mount to ride because Ainz had to spread his legs very wide, and this unstable posture had to be maintained without the assistance of a saddle or horse armor. Even Ainz, who had superior balance over other people, had to be careful not to fall off.

It would be quite difficult to draw swords while riding Hamsuke. Perhaps I should make a saddle and stirrups for him as soon as possible. When I am crafting this, perhaps a nearby armor blacksmith might come and help with its preparation. What made Ainz think this, apart from the unstable ride, was more importantly because of the figure moving parallel to him.

Riding parallel to him on horseback was Narberal. She was riding on top of a giant horse donned with a heavy metal armor, summoned by the item 'Statue of Animal - War Horse'. The heroic sight of Narberal skillfully controlling the giant horse as they sprinted along the road was awe inspiring. Her upright figure, ponytail swaying with the wind, and coffee colored gown billowing because of strong winds from the front, looked just like a scene out of a movie. The difference was like heaven and earth compared to himself, who was riding an overgrown hamster. Feeling depressed, he looked forward and saw a group of men.

It was a four-man group. The armor they wore was more complete than the Swords of Darkness members' with whom Ainz journeyed together with before. Ainz pushed the incident with the Swords of Darkness to the back of his memories, freed himself from his tangled thoughts and looked at the four men on horseback in a trance. Majestic horses. Ainz did not have much knowledge of horses, but that horse coat was a beautiful shade of color, and the body shape looked quite sturdy. It should be some kind of famous horse. The four men on horseback rode in an isosceles triangle formation, also like in a film scene.

I am so very stupid, looking like a moron riding Hamsuke. His mood was dismal, but only Ainz had this feeling. "The monster you ride is quite amazing." One of Igavaruji's companions who was riding alongside spoke to Ainz. The tone was different from Igavaruji's, lacking hostility. Perhaps it was because of an adventurer's curious nature that was stimulated, that the tone was filled with wonder and curiosity.

"What is that monster called? Is it famous?"

"…It's called the Virtuous King of the Forest."

"Huh? What? That's the monster in legends!" The man shouted out with wide eyes. *I still cannot get used to this reaction. Is there a need for such a fuss over a hamster… ah?* In the corner of Ainz' vision, he saw Hamsuke pridefully sway its beard and twitch its ears. A stronger momentum was

transmitted from the waist. He had half of his attention turned towards the conversation between Ainz and the others.

After Ainz used his gauntlet hand to mercilessly chopped Hamsuke's head, he heard a deeply emotional voice. "No, it's just that Igavaruji mentioned it before… So that's how it is. He was jealous."

"How did he describe me? Ah, never mind. It's fine if you don't say. I can roughly guess just by looking at your expression."

"Hahaha, sorry. That fellow… Isn't actually that bad. It's just that sometimes he covets immediate interests."

"…With that kind of companion, your group is lucky to remain unharmed so far. Or is it that your group has changed many members?"

"No, ever since this group was formed there has not been any member who was discarded. Because that fellow's personality and his capability are not on par, he is still quite an outstanding adventurer."

"Outstanding… Huh." Ainz turned to look at Igavaruji and saw a pair of sharp eyes filled with hostile intent.

"Must be hard." After Ainz smiled as he threw out this statement, he lightly raised his hand as a signal to Narberal, commanding her to repress her gradually emerging emotions towards Igavaruji. Ainz did not wish to start a dispute here, as there were more important matters which needed to be dealt with. Hamsuke raised his head and looked over after Ainz indicated to Narberal.

"Master… My head hurts…" Those raven black eyes glistened with tears. He felt a little guilt. Perhaps his chop earlier was too forceful, but then again if he were thrown down at this speed, it wouldn't be good. Even if he hit the ground vigorously, Ainz would not suffer the slightest injury. He had conducted experiments using items with damage mitigating powers like himself, and had felt no pain even when falling from a height of a thousand meters.

The problem were the companions who would feel suspicious about such a sturdy Ainz. Since he had already permitted them to accompany him to this point, he hoped to likewise handle the matter to the end. Ainz' wish was sincere and without hypocrisy. "Run more steadily. I do not wish to forcefully clamp onto your body."

"Understood, master is concerned for this subordinate's body condition right!"

This time Hamsuke welled up with emotional tears. At the moment Ainz ordered him to watch the road when running, Igavaruji's companion from earlier felt impressed again and praised: "Oh, incredible, maintaining such a position while keeping balance. Even if you pre-empt and counterbalance, isn't this position quite dangerous?"

"It's because I'm used to it… Anyhow I plan to install a saddle later."

"Saddle… Is little detested… Of course I am joking! If it is master's opinion, this Hamsuke shall obey without objection!"

Enveloped by Narberal's sharp gaze, Hamsuke desperately exhibited a loyal appearance. Ainz felt a tremor from his waist, a different vibration feeling from sprinting. Ainz furrowed his brows on his illusionary face under the helmet. *There was no need to use murderous intent to frighten a mere hamster? This degree of loyalty is delightful, but could it have gone too far? Discrimination against humans is fine, but it is necessary to be aware of the time and place… She doesn't appear to fully comprehend this part… Are her settings like this? If that's the case then it can't be helped, but still…*

Merely bringing Hamsuke along for the action had already made the name and fame of Momon the adventurer well known, and the Virtuous King of the Forest's loyal appearance as well as its terrified behavior gave two different impressions to others. The former let others believe that Ainz was a great adventurer which was evaluated well. Although he was controlling Hamsuke in both cases, as long as there was an opportunity Ainz would prefer to grow his reputation into that direction. This was because he wished to quickly obtain the title of Hero and not a ruthless person.

Furthermore, obtaining allegiance from those outside of Nazarick would definitely be useful in the future. Ainz reflected on his own actions slightly. Perhaps he was too rough in his treatment of Hamsuke, therefore he gently stroked the area where he had chopped earlier tenderly like he would to a small animal. "Master… It's really embarrassing…" Ainz clearly heard the sound of gnashing teeth nearby, mingled amongst the sound of galloping horses.

…It's partly your fault too, you know? Speaking of which, you were too forceful, apparently out of jealousy? Would it be better to have her do something else? Narberal is also very loyal, but… What kind of reward should I give her? Just as Ainz troubling himself not knowing whether to give a ring or a treasure, Igavaruji let out an unfriendly voice. "Hey, Momon, we've already reached the destination." After indicating understanding, Hamsuke followed by slowly reducing in speed.

Different from horses, being able to communicate directly with Hamsuke was his greatest strength as a mount. If he were riding a horse, Ainz who lacked experience, would not have the confidence to handle it easily. *Riding Hamsuke is certainly a bit embarrassing, but I am also quite fortunate that because of this, I don't have to be riding a horse. However, in the future there may be an occasion when I need to ride on horseback. To cope with that contingency, it's still better that I train horseback riding.*

Ainz jumped down from Hamsuke. After stroking him with the intent of expressing gratitude, Ainz saw Narberal turn the horse back into a statue, and the men leading the horses to one side. "Then, let's be off. What kind of formation do you want when entering?"

"We walk in front, you people follow from behind."

"We won't mind whatever you want to do, but please show concern for us and be careful in your movements." After hearing Igavaruji's impatient response, Ainz took Narberal and Hamsuke into the forest.

Just like the forest near Carne village, this deserted forest was extremely difficult to traverse in. However for Ainz who was equipped with various kinds of magical items, it was as if it were flat ground. Also, because he was worried about Shalltear, his footsteps naturally increased speed continuously, and at times even Igavaruji had to request slowing down the pace. Even if his

requests were justified, the profanities used were full of hostility. Narberal who followed on one side almost shouted out in accusation several times, but was blocked by Ainz on every occasion.

"We're arriving soon. Do not act rashly." Seeing Narberal's wondrous expression made Ainz smile from under his helmet. At this moment Hamsuke felt that something wasn't right, and continuously moved his ears as if trying to clearly locate the source of a sound. Ainz, who knew the reason Hamsuke showed such a reaction, whispered in his ear: "Stop listening."

"What? Master, what are you saying—"

"If what you are hearing is a metallic sound, that's just the noise I am making with my hand. Pay no attention to it."

"Y-Yes, so that's what it is. Forgive me for being rude, master."

"Then, apart from that, have you discovered any signs of tracking?"

He had already ordered Nigredo to monitor, and in addition had taken many precautions, but still just for insurance he still asked for confirmation. "None. In addition, it seems that nobody is tracking."

"Hey, has something happened?" The man who was riding beside Ainz before probed with his question. It was not the group representative Igavaruji who came over to ask, for obvious reasons which need not be spoken. Ainz gave his hand a gentle wave, responding to the other side that there was nothing.

"Is that so?" The man had a look which showed that he did not accept this answer, shrugged and remained silent after knowing that Ainz had no intention to speak. *Even though I harbor no hatred at all towards you people.* Ainz did not say anything, only whispering this in his heart and silently advanced through the forest.

After journeying some distance into the forest, the sound of successively and hastily unsheathing of weapons suddenly came from the back. Ainz stopped his steps and leisurely looked behind. "What is it?"

"Still asking that? If you're walking in front, at least you ought to be a little on alert." For the first time, the men showed an endorsed attitude towards Igavaruji's tone filled with hostility. "Hey! You fellows hiding over there. Come out slowly!" In the direction which Igavaruji shouted at, there was a tree sizeable enough to allow a person to hide behind.

In this tense atmosphere, Ainz calmly walked towards the direction of the tree. Although there were panicked voices calling Ainz from behind, he completely ignored them. Narberal had an unworried expression. Although Hamsuke felt some doubt, he did not stop.

As if in response to Ainz approaching near the tree, a person wearing the same colored armor as Ainz revealed himself from behind the tree. In its hand, the figure wielded a large battle-axe which emitted a weak sickly glow. The appearance of a warrior full of vigor shrouded the entire scene with a strange atmosphere. No, it would be more correct to say that only a part of the place was shrouded in the strange atmosphere.

Ainz lightly raised his hand, gave it a wave and greeted: “Thanks for the hard work.”

“Thank you, Ainz-sama.” The person who appeared, Albedo, respectfully curtseyed. “Then, Shalltear—”

“Who the heck is she? Is she your companion? And what’s with ‘Ainz-sama’?” This loud barrage of questions came in succession from behind Ainz. To Igavaruji and the others, this was a natural reaction, but to Albedo who was maintaining an elegant curtsey, it was an offence which even death would not atone for it. An anger so fierce it would burn the surroundings to cinders burst out.

Hamsuke started shivering, his entire body’s fur stood up and surpassing previous levels. The third party also displayed this reaction. Towards the angered individual, of course his face was deathly pale, and his forehead was drenched in sweat as he felt that at any moment now his life was not guaranteed. “Allow me to introduce to everybody my companion, Albedo.”

“Ainz-sama, to even call someone like me a companion… I am your faithful servant.”

“Now that you say it, yes. I withdraw my earlier statement; she is my subordinate. Is this sufficient to answer your question? Then Albedo, proceed in accordance with our earlier communication and take the next step.”

While the men were all stunned, Albedo got up and walked towards them. “I almost forgot, my name is not Momon, my real name is Ainz. Not that you need to remember it.” Seeing the men not hesitating to show their confused expressions made Albedo give out a cute smile. However that smile came with a cold emotion. “So then… Albedo, get rid of them. Only capture one man… No, catch one more to act as backup. Interference has already been activated, so you can rest assured that there will be no use of magic communication.”

While Ainz’ impartial calm voice made Igavaruji’s men feel inexplicable dismay, Ainz continued to command: “Also bring the corpses back to Nazarick. If they have such strength, they could be used for experimentation to see if it is an intermediary for creating higher-tier undead.”

“Understood.” Albedo slowly and lightly swung the giant axe. This movement was not coupled with killing intent, nor was there any hostility or other negative emotions. It was a natural movement, because to Albedo, to behead such beings was just like chopping the leaves off carrots.

If it were not for Ainz’ command, perhaps she would not even wield the weapon and would still be able to confirm her own condition as unharmed. Igavaruji’s men could not make heads nor tails of the current situation, but knowing that they faced a crisis, they all took up their arms for combat. Shrouded by alarmed gazes, Ainz merely gave a slight shrug. “My fault. What I said in the guild was incorrect: rather than ‘death is certain if you follow me’, I actually meant ‘come along and I shall slaughter the lot of you.’” Ainz pronounced a death sentence towards the crowd of men.

“I had already given my warning, but you would not listen. Therefore this is the result of your own choice. Please willingly accept your fate.” Igavaruji’s group chose to retreat. Their immediate decision to escape without making any prior communications of opinion nor hand gestures was because they all understood the difference in strength.

Furthermore, their choice was not to escape together, but to separate and flee for the highest probability of survival. The opponent's movements appeared to be beyond Albedo's calculations, so she began to move after a brief moment of delay. Even if her physical abilities exceeded Ainz' by far, it would still be tricky to defeat enemies about to escape into the forest with one clean sweep.

She instantly caught up to her first target, using a capturing skill to make the opponent faint. Albedo used her keen sense of hearing to grasp the constant metal sound in the distance mixed in with the screams of the person who had fainted. However, because the line of sight was blocked off by the trees in the forest, it was difficult to confirm the location.

In addition, the men who wore no metal armor made, at most, the sound footsteps upon grass and wood. Therefore it was much harder for Albedo who lacked the guerrilla fighter and thief jobs. Albedo shook her head and sighed, then ordered: "Mare, dispose the body. Ah, right, remember to get rid of the fellow who was discourteous to Ainz-sama."

♦ ♦ ♦

Igavaruji bolted desperately. At the Guild meeting, he had already figured out early on that the man Momon was an adventurer stronger than himself, but Igavaruji was still reluctant to admit this fact. But then, witnessing him riding the monster, the majestic appearance of the great monster from nearby ancient legends, the 'Virtuous King of the Forest', he could only admit even if he was unwilling. To have the strength to tame a monster like that, he was certainly beyond the strength of mithril rank.

After knowing that everyone's discussion in the room back then was true, Igavaruji was filled with rage. *I don't know which country you're famous in, but don't get in our way. If you want information, I'll give it to you. So shut up and go elsewhere.* His own territory was invaded, these were Igavaruji's actual thoughts. To realize his own dream, he relentlessly strengthened his body, experiencing numerous adventures where he narrowly escaped from certain death in order to slowly climb up ranks, yet to have someone from the side leap over many ranks. Of course this would make others feel dissatisfied.

If an opportunity presented itself, he would kick him off the ladder, and even spread false rumors to destroy other's evaluation of him. It was only because of this attempt that Igavaruji decided to travel with him. As such, when Momon's companion cladded in dark armor appeared, wanting to slaughter Igavaruji's group, he was able to choose to retreat without hesitation.

Even in fear he was still able to take action faster than any other person, because he driven by the malicious thought of reporting Momon, no, Ainz' bad news to the Guild as soon as possible. *You deserve this. I will definitely make it back alive, and make public all that you have done!* Even knowing that in this moment, that terrifying weapon could chop downwards from behind, even knowing that his life could be in danger, Igavaruji concealed his internal feelings and let out a jeer.

He was completely regardless of his companion's survival. No, if they became meat shields to allow his own survival, that would be all the better. *I want to be the number one, then obtain orichalcum rank, adamantite rank, and become a hero everyone speaks of.* Apart from himself, there was no need for any other powerful individuals. Companions were all stepping stones for him to reach the peak.

He would become a hero which saved the world just like the thirteen heroes in the past. This was the dream Igavaruji had after listening to the hero legends from the bard visiting the village. Destroying this dream, and surpassing his group. It was even more unforgivable especially because he was the kind of person who would do odd jobs. Run, run, and run. Being able to continuously run through the forest without running out of breath, it was truly fit to call Igavaruji a mithril rank adventurer. However—

Igavaruji faltered. A ripple was made in his heart, and quite a large one too. *Where is this place? I feared that they placed an ambush… So I should have detoured…huh…?* Igavaruji's sense of direction told him that he was correct, however, his sixth sense indicated otherwise. Even if it was his first visit to this forest, he could not have become lost. Yet for unknown reasons, he found himself not knowing where he was…

My senses must be wrong. He determined that this was the case. However, he did not feel that his senses were wrong at all. It was ominous but he had no choice but to accept it. "…Am I lost? How can that be possible… for a Forest Stalker like me to become lost?" Igavaruji's learned job was ranger, specialized in field operations. That also meant to say that forests were like his backyard.

However, now an inexplicable unfamiliar feeling surfaced, as if this forest had transformed into the bloody gaping mouth of a carnivorous beast. "It's just like a maze…" The supposedly familiar forest now appeared to have changed tremendously, making him feel unease and anxiety from the bottom of his heart. At this moment—

A slight rustling sound could be heard. Recalling the black executioner from earlier, Igavaruji frantically turned his head around to look at the source of the sound, and saw a child peering out from behind a tree. It was a dark elf, a close relative of the forest elves, a race which lived in the depths of the forest. *Why would there be a dark elf here?* According to rumors, the dark elves' large village was located in the depths of a huge forest further south, a place never visited before by humans.

Dark elves were basically like that, supposedly living far away from civilization. In this regard, they were vastly different from the forest elves who would trade with humans. It gave off a strange vibe that such a dark elf, and a child on top of that, would appear alone, making Igavaruji feel suspicion. At this moment, the child came out timidly. *Ah, it's a girl.* Wearing a female outfit, a frightened expression surfaced on that incomparably beautiful appearance, stimulating Igavaruji's abusive desires.

Although the thought that this girl was sent over by Momon had crossed his mind, the disparity in attitude between the two was just too great, therefore he felt that it was an impossibility and laughed. More importantly, if this girl was a dark elf of this forest, it must know a safe route. Even if the black armored woman chased him, he could also use this girl to act as a meat shield. With this in mind, and figuring that intimidation was necessary to ensure her obedience, Igavaruji took a step forward.

"…Hey." He intentionally let out a deep intimidating voice, frightening the dark elf into taking a step backwards: "That, s-sorry…" Seeing that battled frightened appearance caused Igavaruji to let out a sneer, feeling that his plan should be carried out smoothly. "No need to apologize. There's just something I wish to ask you, so come here for a second."

"Uh…uh, uh, that… s-sorry." Not knowing why the other side apologized again, Igavaruji was baffled, but the sandalwood wand in the hands of the dark elf girl was already being swung towards him.

Like chains, Igavaruji's entire body was tightly bound by plants. He was alarmed to the point that his entire body was trembling. He was a mithril rank, yet unable to block the magic cast by this girl? Even if he used his entire strength to fight free, the plant did not budge one inch. Filled with anxiety, Igavaruji yelled out as a bluff: "You sh-shitty girl! If you don't let me go, I will kill you! Hey!"

The dark elf gingerly lowered its head and walked towards Igavaruji. It was at this moment that Igavaruji realized that the other side's dress was no trivial item. The clothing and armor was quite amazing, almost like excellent goods which Igavaruji would never ever receive. In addition, from her eyes, the memory of his forest elf friends' words once again dreamily came to mind.

Except, just before this memory was fully formed, a shadow fell across his face. The girl forcefully waved her wand downwards. The girl's face still had a frightened expression, but the eyes did not carry any emotion. There was no feeling whatsoever towards what was about to happen to Igavaruji. That timid attitude looked like it was a performance being instructed by others.

He mentally associated this girl and the demonic black armored woman from earlier. "W-Wait a moment! What are you planning—" Albedo arrived just as Mare's wand descended on the man's head. The helmet hit by the wand deformed, and the skull underneath had also formed a depressed crevice, with the eyeballs squeezed out because of the powerful impact. The skull was completely smashed, just like playing watermelon bashing by the beachside in summer.

"You've worked hard."

"T-That, Albedo-sama, i-its' done… W-Was it alright?" Albedo, who took off her helmet, smiled at Mare who had timidly raised his gaze. "Excellent. Although the execution method was a bit messy, it was completely fine. Ainz-sama should also praise you."

"R-Really! Hehehehe."

After the overjoyed smiling dark elf gave a glance at the corpse, Albedo asked: "What about the last person?"

"Ah, t-that… Has already been resolved. T-The… corpse was moved behind the trees."

"I see. Beautifully done. Then, Mare, can you help me transport the corpses back to Nazarick?"

"U-Understood." Albedo smiled again to the grinning and nodding youth who was holding the bloodied wand. He honestly was a good kid. However, it would be better if he were a little more graceful.

Part 5

"It's been taken care of, Ainz-sama." Ainz nodded in satisfaction after hearing this from Albedo, who had removed her helmet and was carrying it at her waist as she walked over. With this, there

would be no witnesses left regarding the matter with Shalltear. Lifting the shackles of the armor, Ainz relaxed and asked Albedo: "You've worked hard. What is the status of the recovery?"

"Mare has already been ordered to transport it back to Nazarick."

"I see. Then the problem is solved. May those who were killed by the vampire rest in peace, we, the survivors, shall have to restrain our grief and carry on."

"Understood. Ainz-sama what… What is that thing clutching onto the hem of your cloak?"

Ainz turned to look, and discovered Hamsuke grabbing onto the hem of his cloak… It did so naturally, a face that was too large to be trying to hide behind him, but it was odd how fitting it looked. Those large eyes were evidently moist, and its fur was also erect out of fear. Of course, the object of fear was Albedo. "This is Hamsuke. It is sort of like my pet."

"What! This thing managed to obtain the most coveted position of Nazarick?!"

"…Huh? …Ah, Hamsuke. This person is my loyal Albedo, in charge of managing my residence, the Great Tomb of Nazarick. She is also your superior. Do greet her."

"Just as master said, this humble servant is Hamsuke. Please take care of me from now on, Albedo-sama."

"…Pleased to meet you too, Hamsuke."

"Great. With that, let's wrap up the greetings. From here on, Albedo and I shall proceed forward. Narberal, bring Hamsuke and Mare back to Nazarick… And treat the thing I put in your mouth carefully."

"Yes!" Narberal answered in high spirits. Hamsuke rolled the sentient item retrieved from the cemetery around his mouth and mumbled to Narberal: "U-Understood master. Also, this item is noisy! I also have more important matters to ask, can you calm down in my mouth for a bit? Then, your humble servant would like to ask a question… Narberal-sama, will this humble servant be in danger? Will this one be eaten?"

"Since you are apparently Ainz-sama's pet, of course no one will devour you without permission under any circumstances. Do not worry, I will convey this to everyone."

Ainz' face had not moved, but he was smiling. It seemed that after the two of them had worked together in E-Rantel, their relationship had improved. "Good. Then we shall be off, Albedo."

"Yes." Watched by Narberal and Hamsuke, Ainz led Albedo towards Shalltear's direction. "Seeing the corpses of these men, your loyal subordinate remembered what you mentioned in the Throne Hall, don't we need to retrieve the corpses of the men and the woman Ainz-sama disposed last night?"

"About that…"

He was just about to repeat what he said to Narberal last night, that 'it was necessary to make them the instigators of this incident', when he was interrupted by Albedo. "While fighting against

Ainz-sama, they might have obtained some information. Since there is magic that can revive the dead, shouldn't we retrieve the corpses to avoid this risk? Could it be that you have a particular reason in mind?"

Ainz stopped breathing. No, he never breathed in the first place. What Albedo said had hit the nail on the head. *…Damn.* Magic that revived the dead existed in this world. That meant that there was a better way than autopsy to obtain detailed and accurate information. Ainz recalled last night's events. His own identity, Nazarick's name and also Narberal's ability. Those people became aware of these facts and that woman was especially bad news. Such a lethal mistake could not be resolved by admitting failure.

He could only hope that there were no individuals capable of using resurrection magic here. However, from the intelligence obtained from the Sunlight Scripture, it seemed that there were some people capable of using it in the Slane Theocracy. Moreover, there was a high possibility that the highest ranking adventurers could also use it.

Those in the upper echelons of the government could also secretly possess a few individuals capable of using revival magic. With that, once they determined that the deceased held important information, those in the highest positions in E-Rantel would probably find people capable of using revival magic. Since they knew the problem was bad enough to shake E-Rantel, those in the upper echelons would want to dig up more detailed information.

Ainz felt as if his non-existent heart was rapidly thumping out loud. *What should I do?* Without question, they just had to retrieve the corpses. However, who should be ordered to go? Ainz told Narberal to ignore the bodies at that place. Should he openly tell her that it was a mistake? *…No, that should not be said.* Since the current situation is that we still do not know why Shalltear betrayed us, I should avoid saying words that might further lower their loyalty. At times like this, it would be better not to give out orders in panic.

Ainz felt that he could empathize with the company superiors who would refuse to admit failure, and decided with a prayer in his heart. "…What you say is correct. However I have a particular reason to ignore those corpses. Rest assured, everything is within my calculations… Apart from the issue of Shalltear's betrayal."

"So that's it! As expected of Ainz-sama. My thoughts were already anticipated long ago by Ainz-sama. I've spoken too much… My apologies. Speaking of which, why does Ainz-sama not use revival magic at all? When gathering intelligence, it should be possible to do the same to the deceased."

"…Oh?" Ainz naturally let out an out-of-tune exclamation.

"Did I not mention this before? Then have you heard about Demiurge's healing experiments?"

"Yes I have. The experiment involving chopping off the limbs, then applying experimental magic treatment to the severed areas, right?"

"Correct. Let me ask you one more question. Do you know where the resurrection magic has to be applied?"

"Not on corpses?"

"…No. Ah, it shouldn't be?" Both Albedo and Ainz were in deep thought when realization dawned in Albedo's eyes. "Ah, I was wrong. Ainz-sama said correctly— not bodies, but on the soul!"

"Correct. In Demiurge's experiments, the severed limbs would disappear, and then regrow from the body. Therefore in a situation where magic was cast on the soul, what would then happen to the corpse?"

In Yggdrasil, there were four different methods of resurrection to choose from in exchange for experience points. The first type was on-site resurrection. The second type was resurrection at the entrance of a dungeon. The third type was resurrecting at a nearby safe town. Finally, the fourth type was resurrection at a specified location, such as a guild. So, just what sort of resurrection magic existed in this world?

Needless to say, the one Ainz wanted to avoid the most was the fourth type, which would revive them back at their respawn point. If Nigan's respawn point was in the Slane Theocracy, then it would be tantamount to resurrecting an enemy who held information. He would have committed the folly of releasing the tiger back into the mountains. Therefore, there was no way to conduct resurrection magic experiments. This result apparently had backfired.

"So that's how it is. It really does require close attention. As expected of Ainz-sama. Such perception is admirable." Seeing Albedo lower her head and sigh, Ainz immediately shook his head and replied: "You honestly need not mind about such matters. Still, it is necessary to find a place to carry out experiments… Eh eh. Well then, let us pick up our spirits and set off again."

Under Albedo's guidance, Ainz proceeded to head deeper into the forest. Within it, the two people came across a vast clearing. In a place that could be called serene, stood a completely dissonant, scarlet-armored figure. The appearance of a fantasy-like illusion shone brilliantly in the sunlight, but the bloody stench in the air destroyed this atmosphere.

Shalltear. Her appearance was exactly the same as it was on the 'Crystal Monitor', even her posture looked like it had not changed. Therefore, Ainz momentarily wondered if he was still looking at a monitor. However, there was a realistic sensation here: the bloody stench drifting along with the wind. Ainz continuously took deep breaths, but since his body was obviously incapable of breathing, he only went through the motion, or it may have just been a reflection of how he felt emotionally.

"Shalltear." Ainz called out. Ainz felt that he had issued a commanding voice full of authority, not a useless deep and hoarse voice. However, there was no reaction. He called out again, carefully and intently looking at Shalltear. Shalltear was not ignoring him. Her lifeless eyes were open but devoid of spirit, empty, giving off the impression that no consciousness resided behind them. Albedo, who was also present, flushed with anger at Shalltear's attitude.

"Shalltear! Not only do you not offer a single word of explanation, you dare show such insolence towards Ainz-sama—"

"Albedo, you are noisy! Silence! Do not move! You are not permitted to approach Shalltear!" With a rough tone, Ainz stopped Albedo who was about to take a step forward. Under normal circumstances Ainz would rarely display such an attitude towards his past-companion's creations, but this time it was impossible to restrain his emotions.

He was shocked at Shalltear's condition. "…Could this be… Is it possible? …Unbelievable." Ainz felt dismay as he compared his past experiences with Shalltear's current appearance. At the same time, he forcibly maintained his composure and made a calm judgment, knowing that the possibility was very high. He opened his mouth to talk with Albedo, wanting to explain his train of thought to others and use this as a pretext to allow himself to get his facts in order.

"I am certain. Shalltear is currently under mind control."

"Is this because of the reason Ainz-sama talked about in the Throne Hall?"

"We still do not know if that is the case. While prying information from the Sunlight Scripture, I have witnessed something similar. This is indeed the result of mind control. I do not know for certain why the undead Shalltear was affected by mind control, but perhaps it may have been caused by something particular to this world?"

Ainz folded his arms, staring sharply at Shalltear who was standing rigidly. "Shalltear's consciousness is being controlled by an unknown person, and something happened just before that person was able to give any orders. Perhaps she acted at the same time and defeated the opponent… Leading her to remain alone here in an idle state. That should be pretty close to what happened.

However, she may take defensive action should you attack or get too close to her, NPCs with an evil alignment have the tendency to attack, so do not go near her."

"Understood. But then there will be no means to forcibly restrain and bring her to Nazarick. It does not matter if the person controlling Shalltear is already dead, but if that person is still alive, then leaving her like this will eventually be dangerous."

"Your concern is correct."

The reason why Shalltear was affected by mind control was unknown. There might be a peculiar ability in this world that was effective against the undead. If so, Ainz could also be affected by mind control if he stayed here. "Although using this item is a bit of a waste, it is still best to release Shalltear from mind control as quickly as possible." Ainz spread his fingers. On one of his fingers, he wore a simple ring that had no kinds of decorations whatsoever. It was engraved with three shooting stars that emitted a silver light, and was actually the most powerful of all the rings in Ainz' possession.

"That is…?" In response to Albedo's puzzled expression, Ainz smiled proudly despite the fact that his face did not move, and revealed the ring's name. "This super rare item, the 'Shooting Star' ring, enables the use of the magic 'Wish upon a Star' three times without consuming experience." This was the gacha item Ainz gambled his entire year-end bonus away for. Amongst all the guild members, only two people, Ainz and Yamaiko, had this incredibly rare ring.

No. Rather than describing this ring as a rare item, perhaps it would be better called a symbol of stupidity, having spent so much money on the game to get it. Embedded in the ring was the Super-tier magic 'Wish upon a Star'. The number of possible wishes that appeared would be proportional to the amount of consumed experience.

This meant that activating the ring/spell in exchange for ten percent of your total experience points would present a single choice, whereas consuming fifty percent would give five possible choices. There were quite a few wishes to choose from. According to a strategy website's statistics, there were allegedly over two hundred of them. Additionally, there were some wishes which appeared more easily, and wishes which did not appear so easily, therefore it was a horrifying magic where any carelessness could make the user waste a lot of experience.

Also, magic casters who wanted to learn this Super-tier magic had to reach the ninety-fifth level first. Even in Yggdrasil where it was easy to level up, reaching this level would still require a considerable amount of experience, therefore people hesitated whether or not to gamble their experience points on such a spell. When using this ring to activate the Super-tier spell 'Wish upon a Star', the possible wishes one could choose from would be completely randomized, just like normal.

However, useful wishes had a comparatively higher chance to appear instead of joke wishes. Also, the maximum amount of wishes which would appear was ten, and the magic had zero activation time, therefore it truly was the most powerful cash item. Using such a cash item — one which even had an element of gambling — would of course be a shame, but Shalltear was irreplaceable. But expending his own experience points here could affect the usage of his other special abilities which consumed experience points to activate, therefore the choice was still made with hesitation.

Ainz gazed at the ring. Ainz hoped the activated wish was one which would dispel all of the effects on the target. Although there were many alternative options to choose from, what came to his mind was this most direct method. Because it would also cancel positive effects, this wish was seldom chosen in the game, so Ainz who made this decision smiled.

"Well then, ring, I WISH!" Of course, the magic item could also be activated without saying this. However, having to choose this strong desire most ideal for the situation from among more than two hundred wishes made Ainz shout out like this. It was the same shout as one would make while rolling the dice on a do-or-die gamble.

Because Yggdrasil magic also had the same effect in this world, the ring-activated ability would definitely release Shalltear from the mysterious mind control effect. No, this was what he wanted to believe. The outcome Ainz had feared the most would have been if the ring itself failed to activate, but it seemed to have been a needless worry. The ring released its magic without a problem and… The red light in Ainz' eye sockets narrowed.

"What is… This…" As if new information was being forced into his brain he felt… Something unpleasant. Yet at the same time, and connected to it, he also felt a great sense of euphoria. A large variety of human emotions hit Ainz like a wave. While the emotional ripples dissipated from his body, Ainz realized that this world's 'Wish upon a Star' was changed from Yggdrasil's to the point that they were practically not the same.

When he knew about Nfirea's innate ability, he had fantasized about the possibility of obtaining it by activating 'Wish upon a Star'. This speculation was not wrong. In this world, 'Wish upon a Star' had already become a magic which made the realization of one's innermost desires possible. Although it would be based on the value of the consumed experience, 'Wish upon a Star' had become a magic which made the impossible possible. Moreover, if five levels were consumed, five-hundred percent of experience, the magic would even enable the realization of even stronger desires.

With this, Ainz was certain it would be able to remove the magic effect on Shalltear's body, and shouted out with a victorious spirit: "Dispel all the effects applied on Shalltear's body!" After the voice sounded for a second, the light in Ainz' eyes instantaneously flared. "…How… How is this possible?" Ainz' agitated appearance made Albedo realize that the situation had changed. She asked nervously: "W-What is it? Ainz-sama!"

Ainz did not reply to the question, but instead recalled his extensive in-game experience in Yggdrasil, the information absorbed from strategy websites, and combined this knowledge with the variety of information gathered after arriving at this world. And most importantly the information he received from trying to use 'Wish upon a Star', which threatened to envelop his entire existence. At the moment he made his conclusion, incredible anxiety and rage emerged in Ainz. However, even if his spirit was able to remain stable, there would still be one emotion left… Fear.

The flustered Ainz shouted out: "R-Retreat! Albedo don't get close! Retreat quickly!"

"Yes! Understood!" Ainz immediately cast transfer magic. In the next moment, raised earth entered their view. Although he arrived safely at home, Ainz still frantically ordered: "Albedo! Be careful and vigilant of anyone who follows the transfer!"

"Yes!" Albedo took up her arms and stood beside Ainz. Ainz also held out his empty hands, ready to adapt to any changes. Finally after some time had passed, Ainz slowly relaxed. Albedo also shifted from a lowered-waist defensive posture to a normal stance.

"Damn it!" Even after calming down, a strong emotion of anger still appeared. After becoming an undead, Ainz' strong emotions were automatically suppressed, but even after it was kept in check, new rage immediately resurfaced. "Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!" Ainz continuously forcibly kicked the ground. Because his physical strength was extraordinary, a large amount of dirt was kicked up. Had there been no rain in the past few days, the surroundings would have raised an alarming amount of dust. Even so, it was unable to quell Ainz' anger.

"A-Ainz-sama, p-please calm down…" Sensing that Albedo's voice carried fear, Ainz realized that his actions were not befitting that of the identity of a master. He rapidly regained his composure, and forcibly exhaled his non-existing breath, as if expelling the burning anger in his heart all at once. "…Forgive me, I lost my composure. Pretend you didn't see anything just now."

"Please don't say that. However, I am grateful that Ainz-sama was able to heed my advice! If Ainz-sama commands me to pretend not to have seen anything, I shall forget this incident in its entirety. However… What happened? Did I cause Ainz-sama to feel displeasure? If you are willing to tell me, I will work hard to never let this happen again!"

"…I was not directing that at you, Albedo. It was because I knew, after activating the ring's power, that my wish did not come true."

Seeing Albedo remain silent, Ainz knew that his explanation was not clear enough and continued to elaborate: "…There's only one power that can override 'Wish upon a Star's magic." If it were before, he would perhaps think that it could possibly be some power of this world that was acting as the obstruction, but Ainz could now confidently reply that it was not caused by such power. This was because when he activated the magic, he already realized from the feeling that rushed in. "N-No way… That is…"

"Yes, Albedo. Only one… World class items."

There were only two hundred of these items in Yggdrasil, even Guild weapons and Divine class weapons couldn't match them. If a World class item was used, it would be a breeze to control undead which were immune to mental effects. At this moment, Ainz thought about the Guardians still outside Nazarick.

They could also be targeted. Blaming himself for not considering this possibility, Ainz ordered Albedo: "Albedo, immediately recall all of the Guardians outside. It is necessary to check if they are also being controlled like Shalltear. I must head to the Throne Hall right away! After, the place I must go to is… The Treasure Hall."

4章 死戦を前に

Before the Deathmatch

Part 1

Upon teleporting to the Treasure Hall, what greeted Ainz' eyes was a brilliant light, as if all the stars in the sky were gathered together. A ceiling so high that one would have to look up to even know that it was there, a wall so large that it was impossible to contain it in one's vision. That vast room was filled with dazzling treasure.

In the center were gold and jewels forming a mountain range throughout the room. It was enough to make one abandon the thought of counting just how much it all amounted to. Buried amongst the mountains of gold, luxury items of the finest craftsmanship could be seen scattered about.

With a single glance, there was a cup forged in gold, a scepter embedded with various jewels, a beast pelt radiating a silver light, tapestry meticulous woven with golden thread, a horn flute that shone like a pearl, a fan of seven colors, a crystal bottle, an elaborate ring giving off a faint glimmer of light, and a mask decorated with a black and a white jewel, crafted from the hide of some animal.

Needless to say, this was just the tip of the iceberg. In that mountain of gold, there were perhaps two or three hundred such items of that class. It was literally a mountain of treasure. Ainz heard a sigh of admiration from the people who were accompanying him. The ones who made that noise were two people.

So it was two out of three… Ainz glanced at the three women standing behind him. In a white dress instead of battle armour, Albedo was checking out her surroundings with a look of sincere admiration on her beautiful face. Yuri Alpha, who returned Ainz' ring after he returned to Nazarick, had the same expression. One person however, was different from the other two. She did not sigh, but observed Ainz silently.

Although her face was very delicate, it looked as if it was artificially crafted by hand. Her one visible emerald eye glimmered with a cold light, like that of a precious jewel. The other eye was concealed by an eye-patch. Her reddish gold hair shone under the starlight from the ceiling.

She was of the Automaton race, CZ2128 Delta, also known as Shizu. As a battlemaid, her attire was similar to that of Narberal and Yuri. However, her biggest difference from those two were her urban camouflage accessories and the cute sticker attached to a corner of her skirt with '1 yen' written on it. The other significant difference was the white gun she had holstered on her waist like how one would wear a sword. By the way, the magic gun, Automaton, and Shizu's job 'Gunner' were all additional details added after the large update patch 'Valkyrie's Downfall'.

Yuri nudged her lens-less black-rimmed glasses. As if her sense of duty as a maid could not condone this disorderly mess, she asked: "Ainz-sama, why aren't these treasures looked after well? Even with protective magic applied, this cannot be considered a good state of preservation. Should you give the order, we will immediately get started with tidying up…"

“Take a closer look around.” In the span of a single breath, Yuri surveyed her surroundings and apologized. “I have been discourteous, please forgive my shallow observations.”

“Pay it no mind. Nonetheless, that is how it is. What’s buried inside this mountain of gold is of little value.”

Yuri followed Ainz’ line of sight which was rested on the reason why she had apologized. Placed all over the walls were numerous large cabinets tall enough to reach the ceiling. Inside these cabinets were treasures which sparkled even brighter than the gold mountain.

A wand embedded with a bloodstone, scarletite gauntlet embedded with a garnets, lens made from black diamond embedded in the middle of silver rings, dog statue made from Obsidian, dagger crafted from purple amethyst, a small altar embedded with countless white pearls, glass lilies which looked as if they were releasing rainbow colored light, delicate roses crafted from star rubies, tapestry patterned with the image of a soaring black dragon, a crown made of platinum adorned with a humongous diamond, golden incense bowl coated in precious gems, a pair of male and female lions made from sapphires and rubies, cufflinks inlaid with fire opals which looked as if it were in flames, beautifully carved rosewood cigar box, coat made from the hide of a golden beast, twelve plates made from Apoitakara, silver anklets embedded with four different colors of jewels, a magic book with a demantoid cover, life-sized statue of a large woman made from gold, belt with large pieces of imperial topaz stitched on, chess set with each piece made from a different type of precious gem, fairy-figure carved from a single piece of emerald, a black cloak with in numerous small precious stones sewn on; cup carved from a unicorn’s horn, golden table with an embedded crystal balls, and more.

This was just a small portion. Other than these, there were many aquamarine mirrors, red crystals the size of adults, the giant and elaborate statue of a warrior radiating with silver-white light called the work of a Ghost Axe God, a stone pillar carved with characters of an unknown language, alexandrite so large that two outstretched arms would be needed to encircle it. These countless treasures made the correct answer evident to Yuri, that there was simply no space to store them.

“Time to go.” Two people spoke out in response to Ainz. Only Shizu remained silent, giving a nod instead to indicate her response. After Ainz invoked the spell ‘Mass Flight’, the four people unanimously flew up into the sky. Only then was it apparent that there was a body of deadly gas, faint purple in color, floating in the air. Yuri looked around to find the source of the purple gas. However neither the ceiling, walls or corners had anything emitting that purple cloud. As a look of confusion surfaced on Yuri’s face, a monotone voice spoke up. “…Yuri-nee, there is toxic magic in the air.”

“What?” Yuri felt a cold glance in her direction. The source was Shizu’s calm green pupil; an eye which harbored no emotion. A better way to put it would be that it induced others to believe it was incapable of feeling emotion. Shizu’s facial features were delicate, but in another sense it was also like a mask. Because she was created as an automaton, Shizu could not display emotions, such were her settings.

“…Blood of Jormungandr?” After Shizu revealed the name of this tool capable of creating such a toxic zone, Ainz replied: “Ah, correct answer. Although I have not informed you, this treasure renders the surrounding air highly toxic. If you did not possess any abilities or tools capable of countering this toxicity, you would have dropped dead within three steps.”

"So, is that why I… Apologies… Is that why we three were selected?"

"Correct." Both the Dullahan Yuri who was adjusting her glasses and the emotionless automaton Shizu were immune to toxins because of their racial traits. Being of the demonic race, Albedo was not immune to toxins, but of course relied on another method to render it ineffective.

"Correct, that is the reason all of you were brought here, but… Shizu, it is not only that. It was also to confirm something." Thus Ainz and the others used 'Mass Flight' to bypass the effort needed to cross the gold mountain, and arrived in front of a door on the other side. No, could it really be called a door? It was in the shape of a door, but looked like a bottomless pit attached to the wall. Arriving at this picturesque door, Ainz was deep in thought.

"This here is the armory, what was the password again…?"

"Ainz-sama, if there is an armory, does it mean that there are treasures concealed in other locations?"

…Huh? Albedo doesn't know all the relevant information about the contents of the Treasure Hall? Ainz was puzzled over why Albedo would ask such a question. Nonetheless, even if she was unaware of such information, it still made sense.

The treasures were not housed inside the Great Tomb of Nazarick. It was necessary to use a ring of Ainz Ooal Gown to be transported to that location. It was designed in such a way to make an invasion extremely difficult. It was normal for Albedo to be oblivious of this information, since she didn't have her own ring just ten days ago. Although Ainz somewhat wondered just how much knowledge the NPCs possessed, he felt it was a trivial problem and replied to the earlier question.

"Ha ha. I had a comrade by the name of Genjiro. He took pleasure in keeping things neat and organized, and should have categorized objects according to their purpose."

"Wasn't he the Supreme Being who created our companion Entoma?"

"Yes, Yuri, you are correct. However, whether he actually relishes tidiness may be questioned. If he truly did, the treasures in that gold mountain would be managed more orderly, and he would not describe his own room as a mess. Speaking of which, he should have already separated the items into categories: armors, weapons, jewelry, auxiliary tools, consumables, manufacturing goods, etc. In addition, there is also the Nazarick maintenance room… Yes, and also the crystal data storage room."

During this rant, Ainz' finger was pointed towards the wall, where a two-dimensional shadow had appeared. "However, in reality the inside is connected so it shouldn't matter which way we enter… Ah, sorry. I have talked too much."

"Not at all, we are grateful towards Ainz-sama for answering our questions so passionately." Following Albedo's statement, the two battlemaids simultaneously bowed to express their gratitude.

There is no time to spare; what am I doing. Every time I brag about Nazarick, I can't stop myself… Ainz shrugged, then turned again to face the shadow in front of him. This door could only be opened by a predetermined password. Perhaps with magic or a skill from the Rogue class, one could force

this door open. But Ainz had never learnt such magic or skill, therefore, it was necessary to speak the password…

Ack… I forgot. This is understandable. As such mechanisms were plentiful in Nazarick, it was possible to remember passwords for the place one visits frequently, but there weren't many opportunities to visit the Treasure Hall, so it was impossible to remember the password for such a place. Ainz only ever visited to withdraw funds to pay for the upkeep of Nazarick so it had already been many years since he last stepped foot here.

Failing to retrieve the password from his memories, Ainz said the universal password: "「Glory to Ainz Ooal Gown.」" The dark door responded to this phrase, and some text appeared like floating images in water. The words which appeared were: 'Ascendit a terra in coelum iterumque descendit in terram et recipit vim superiorum et inferiorum.'[1]

"…Tabula Smaragdina really was a perfectionist." Ainz couldn't help but let this slip, getting a vague reaction from Albedo. His mind drifted to one of the people responsible for designing Ainz Ooal Gown's mechanisms. Of all the small mechanisms in the Great Tomb of Nazarick, two were by his design.

Abundantly sophisticated designs like this ate up a large amount of the given data quota in the Great Tomb of Nazarick, causing other players to become unable to design freely and hence caused them to protest. He took responsibility, paying for cash items to expand the amount of data.

Ainz paid serious attention to the words that surfaced. This must be a password hint, but what does it mean? Ainz spent some time relentlessly searching for the answer hidden deeply in his mind. Before long, Ainz finally found the door code from his deepest memories. "It should be — and so, thou monopolize the glory of the world, and the darkness shall flee before thee — right?" Ainz who spoke looked towards Shizu as if seeking confirmation. Shizu nodded in response to Ainz.

Other than Tabula Smaragdina, the comrade who was also responsible for designing mechanisms was the creator of the NPC Shizu. Her character settings were set to be familiar with Nazarick's mechanism unlocking methods. Because of this, Shizu should have easily been able to decipher the earlier password hint. But despite knowing this, Ainz still did not ask for her assistance, simply for the sake of his stubbornness of wanting to open the door with his own efforts.

Coming to this world gave life to the Great Tomb of Nazarick. That is why he wanted to be the first to leave his footprint on this ground. Just like how a person wishes to step on fresh, undisturbed snow, Ainz wished to open the door himself. As if in response to Ainz' wishes, the black shadow was sucked away into a single point, and before long, the original shadow was gone as if it had never been there. Only a fist-sized black sphere floated in the air.

Because the shadow covering the door had disappeared, it was possible to peer inside the opened hole. There lay a well-managed and orderly world, totally different from the places before. If an analogy is desired, the most fitting description would be similar to a museum exhibition. The dimly lit room was very long, stretching inwards continuously. There was a space of about five meters between the floor and ceiling.

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[1] "With great sagacity it doth ascend gently from Earth to Heaven. Again it doth descend to Earth, and uniteth in itself the force from things superior and things inferior." ~Holmyard, *Alchemy*, p.95

It was not designed with human height in mind, but to allow entry for non-humans. The width of the room was approximately ten meters. The floor was closely paved with slabs emitting black light, appearing like a single enormous piece of stone. It created an atmosphere of solemn tranquility. Both sides of the room were lined with numerous weapons, which was quite a spectacle to behold.

"Get in." Without waiting for the response of the other three people, Ainz walked straight into the armory. Greeting the trio was a range of weapons, including broadswords, great swords, estocs, flamberges, scimitars, patas, shotels, kukris, claymores, short swords, sword breakers… Of course, the display consisted of more than just swords. There were also one-handed axes, two-handed axes, one-handed blunt weapons, one-handed spears, bows, cross-bows…

Even after classifying the weapons, one would still lose count. Apart from those, there were also many flashy weapons which raised the question of whether they could still be classified as weapons. Some seemed impossible to fit inside their scabbards and focused only on its appearance, etc. These types of weapons made up the majority. Almost none of these weapons were made from common metals like iron.

There were weapons with blades made from blue crystal, pure white blades with gold patterns, black blades with engraved purple runes, even a bow with strings seemingly made out of light. Aside from these, there were weapons that were obviously dangerous with just a glance. A double-handed axe with blood oozing out of its edge, a huge mace where faces of agony would occasionally flash across the black metal, a spear which looked as if it were formed from entwining human hands. Such weapons were also numerous.

Whilst it was easy to guess that these were mostly magic weapons, one couldn't even begin to guess at their effects. A sword with a blade swaying like flames was quite obvious, but the magical effect of a whip-like sword with the appearance of a squirming centipede was simply impossible to predict. The group observed these weapons from the side and silently walked towards the center of the armory.

After around one hundred meters in, approximately passing several thousand weapons on the way, they arrived at their destination, a rectangular shaped room. Possibly used to receive guests, in this otherwise empty room there were only sofas and tables. Looking to the side, you could see an entryway similar to the one which Ainz and the others had come in from.

There was only one path that could be taken in the place opposite from the entrance direction, and there was a different atmosphere. If up until now it was a museum, from here onwards it was a tomb. The height and width was about the same, but this even dimmer room stretched endlessly inwards. Although it was difficult to discern due to the bad viewing angle, it was still possible to spot the numerous large pits dug into the wall which seemed to have something placed inside.

Hearing the alarmed voices from behind, Ainz replied: "Before us lies the Mausoleum."

"The Mausoleum?"

"Hmm? Albedo… You don't know the name of the room past here?" *Though I chose the name myself… Seeing as Albedo is like this, could it be that she does not know who the caretaker of the Treasure Hall is?*

“Then, do you know Pandora’s Actor?”

“Yes. As part of my management responsibilities, I know his name and appearance… Pandora’s Actor is the Treasure Hall’s Area Guardian, equal in strength to Demiurge and I. Apart from managing this place, he is also in charge of preparing the gold consumed when activating Nazarick’s protection net and other responsibilities. Simply put, he is the one in charge of finance.”

“That’s roughly it, but not quite right. That fellow—”

Ainz’ speech was interrupted before he could finish his sentence, the three NPC characters turned their heads to look at the path, at a figure which had suddenly appeared. It had a bizarre appearance. Although the body was that of a humanoid, its head was similar to that of a distorted octopus. On the right side of the head, at least half was covered by crooked text tattoos, similar to those which appeared on the door earlier.

The skin color was like a corpse, deathly white with some purple mixed in, emitting a strange sheen as if covered in a layer of mucus. Each hand had four slender, webbed fingers. Its garments were completely black and decorated with silver accessories that matched well with the glossy leather that clung tightly to its body. It wore several loosely-fitting belts and had a black cloak which looked as if it were about to be worn was folded and being held.

Simply put, it was truly of an alien race. Six squirming tentacles extended from the side of the mouth to near the thigh. Those two pupil-less and blue-white murky eyes turned to look at the group. Albedo let out a surprised voice: “Tabula Smaragdina-sama!” This was one of the 41 Supreme Beings. In terms of pure destructive power, he was a stronger magic caster than Ainz.

“No, wrong!” Albedo immediately exclaimed. Following her reaction, the two battlemaids sprang into action. Shizu took out her gun, resting the rifle butt against her shoulder and facing the muzzle towards the figure. Yuri smashed her fists together in front of her chest; her metal gauntlets collided to release a loud bell-like sound. Next, she slid to Albedo’s side, in front of Ainz and Shizu. Ainz was a magic caster, Shizu was a gunner. This was the best position to protect those two who were unsuited for melee battles.

“Identify yourself!? Even if you disguise yourself as a Supreme Being, I am not foolish enough to fail in recognizing my own creator!” Faced with Albedo’s question, the person with the appearance of Tabula Smaragdina merely tilted his head in silence. “…Is that so. Kill him.” As her cold voice rang out, the two battlemaids hesitated briefly. Even if they didn’t know who this was, they still had reservations about attacking someone with the appearance of one of the creators. Given the situation, the battlemaids were not wrong, Albedo was just that good in making calm and collected judgment without hesitation. This course of action placed Ainz’ protection as the utmost priority.

Albedo clicked her tongue at the two who didn’t act, and was just about to charge forward when Ainz spoke: “That’s enough, Pandora’s Actor. Show your true form.” Tabula Smaragdina’s body contorted. A moment later, in place of the fake Tabula Smaragdina there was still an alien, but a different person. It had a fairly flat face, with the nose and other parts that would normally be protruding flattened. Instead of eyes and a mouth there were three empty holes instead - no eyeballs, teeth or tongue. Only three holes which looked like those drawn by a child with a pen.

The pink, egg-shaped head was smooth, without a single strand of hair on it. This strange character was a Doppelganger, just like Narberal. This was Pandora's Actor, a level 100 NPC designed by Ainz to guard the Treasure Hall. He specialized in transformation, capable of replicating 45 appearances, and their abilities but only at 80% of the original's power. The badge on his head bore the emblem of Ainz Ooal Gown, but the clothes he wore were an uniform from the European Ecological Infrastructure War twenty years ago, which caused quite a stir for looking similar to the uniforms worn by the Neo-Nazi Schutzstaffel.

He forcefully brought his feet together with a click, and brought his right hand to his cap in a dramatic salute. "Welcome, my creator, Momonga-sama!"

"…You look very lively."

"Affirmative, every day I am full of energy! Speaking of which, what brings you here today? You've even brought along the Overseer of the Guardians and maid ojou-sans."

Seeing the Area Guardian's entrance, Yuri and Albedo retreated behind Ainz and back to their positions. The three each displayed a different emotion. Yuri, who had her pride as battlemaid, nudged her glasses and appeared displeased upon being called an ojou-san. Albedo, standing beside Ainz, became jealous after hearing how Pandora's Actor was Ainz's personal creation. She stood out of his sight and pursed her lips. Shizu showed no reaction, only holstered the weapon in her hand.

"To the innermost safe, in order to retrieve the World class items."

"What did you say! Has the time to use their power already arrived?" Pandora's Actor exaggeratedly displayed an expression of shock. This attitude made Ainz furrow his non-existing brows. The uniform as well, why did he set his reactions to be so exaggerated… No, Ainz knew the reason why. Ainz was the creator of Pandora's Actor, that was also to say that his every movement was what Ainz considered 'cool', and he was proud and happy back when he made these settings.

"…Ugh, this is just…" In the past, he thought that those who wore military uniform were cool. Since he was an actor, his actions should be more exaggerated. But watching him gain sentience and actually acting it out—

"Wow… So lame—" A tiny bit, so soft that no one else could overhear him, Ainz could not help but let a whisper of his honest opinion leak out. It was truly a black history. A living relic of his dark past, Pandora's Actor. If the other guild members of the Great Tomb of Nazarick were here right now, where NPCs came alive, this would definitely be the largest topic of laughter. That's how Ainz felt, he was not pointing out anyone specifically.

"…Let it be, I need to pick myself up. The undead me does not have the time to suffer psychological trauma." Ainz quietly reminded himself, then gave a calm reply. "…Yes, you're right. I plan to retrieve 'Greed and no Desire', 'The Cup of Hygeia', 'Memory Blade' and 'Painting of Life'."

"…And what about the remaining two?"

“Leave them be, since they can only be used once. Because they are so powerful, they must only be used at the right moment, or when we know how to re-obtain it after their use.”

“Indeed, those overpowered weapons are powerful enough to be called killer trump cards. They make the impossible possible, even possessing the power to destroy the world.”

“…Pandora’s Actor, I wish to test you. There are two hundred World class items in total. How many do you know of?”

“My apologies Momonga-sama. I only know of eleven.”

Ainz nodded. That was the number of World class items which Ainz Ooal Gown possessed. He did not know that there was one World class item ‘Atlas’ which had been taken from them in the past. There were parts he wasn't sure about, but the NPCs' knowledge was affected by their settings and if there were any contradictions they would simply ignore them.

About this type of NPC settings, Ainz realized certain things after a few days of observation. When there are no specific settings for some part of the NPC’s personality, they seemed to take after their creator. Even the relationship between the NPCs seemed to mirror that of their creators. In some respects, it was like reliving the times with his guild companions. Such as the relationship between Shalltear and Aura, between Demiurge and Sebas.

Ainz’ expression did not change as he smiled. *Simply put, they are like everyone’s children.* Feeling the semblance of past comrades once again by his side, Ainz felt happy, but lonely at the same time. Ainz shook his head to get rid of the sad emotions. “Ah, this… Pandora’s Actor, I’ve asked you a pointless question.”

“Not at all, my knowledge is lacking, my sincere apologies.” After this, he bowed, every movement exaggerated as if he were putting up an act.

“…Let it be. I need to head to the Mausoleum soon. Has anything happened here?”

“Nothing at all, because everything here belongs to Momonga-sama and the Supreme Beings. How could anything happen.” He said in a dramatic tone, and pointed to his surroundings. “However, I am somewhat regretful since Momonga-sama came, I thought that you had some task for me.” Ainz stopped, and evaluated the alien. Correct, Ainz thought about using him.

Pandora’s Actor’s setting, whether it was intellect or strategic thinking, was of the top tier in Nazarick. Although he would normally put this wisdom and tactical thinking to some obscure use, when in a pinch it would be difficult to forgo utilizing his intellect. Moreover, Pandora’s Actor’s ability had a wide range of applicability, and depending on the situation, could even prove to be useful as all of the Floor Guardians combined.

However the reason Ainz created him was neither for battle nor for business. It was for the purpose of preserving the identity of ‘Ainz Ooal Gown’, leaving behind the images of his companions. “…You are our final trump card. I wouldn’t want to send you to do chores.”

“…Your words are too kind.” An expression like he wanted to say something — probably — Pandora’s Actor exaggeratedly lowered his head in a bow.

“I hear and obey. So then, today onwards I shall continue to look after the Treasure Hall.”

“Ah, good work. Also, from now on call me Ainz; Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“Ah! Understood, my creator Ainz-sama!” After Pandora’s Actor’s salute, Ainz, having finished speaking, turned around. At this moment, a voice spoke out from behind him. “However, Ainz-sama, although this may be disrespectful, if a situation has arisen which merits the use of the World class items, it would still be better to allow me to leave the Treasure Hall to operate on some other floor.”

“…”

Indeed, he had a point. Although Pandora's Actor was a treasure, it would be foolish to let him sit around doing nothing if this resulted in losing an even more valuable treasure. This situation should rightly be viewed as an emergency and make use of his abilities. And the gold coins in Treasure Hall also needed to be moved to the Throne Room. Having decided so, Ainz turned around just in time to see Pandora’s Actor place a hand on his chest in recommendation of himself.

Ainz also heard the expressionless Shizu softly let out an ‘uwah’ sound. This sound deeply hurt Ainz… But he settled his spirit. Pandora’s Actor’s movements were definitely too exaggerated, from the perspective as his creator, his posture and especially his behavior, they all seemed to radiate an ‘I am cool’ feeling.

If it was from a handsome man, that kind of mannerism might fit. However, since the person was an egghead, it was simply too incompatible. Furthermore, it made the witness Ainz feel embarrassed. Ainz silently observed Pandora's Actor for a moment before he took a ring out of his Item Box and tossed it at him.

The ring drew an arc through the air, landing neatly in Pandora’s Actor’s hand. “This is… A ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, and the item’s ability is…” As Pandora’s Actor was about to continue his explanation, Ainz held up his hand and brought him to a halt. Although he had a sorrowful expression, this was not the time to be concerned about that. “This is preparation. Albedo, first inform the battlemaids of Nazarick about Pandora’s Actor’s existence. Before that, Pandora’s Actor, you may only travel between the Throne Hall and the Treasure Hall.”

“I hear and obey.”

After the two spoke, Pandora’s Actor placed his legs together so forcefully that it was almost audible. His fingers were also so straight that even his fingernail could not have stretched further. This earnest salute, if one were to put it in a negative way, was too showy. Ainz gently shook his head as he watched the egghead. He wasn’t a bad person, in fact, his ability and efficiency were impressive, but the big shame is that—

“Uwah…”

Why did he have to be set to have such a personality. The past me certainly thought this was very cool. Well, I still think at least the uniform is a bit cool… If Ainz could blush, his face would be as red as a tomato right now. “Hey, Pandora’s Actor. Follow me.” Ainz grabbed Pandora’s Actor’s shoulder and

pulled him to one side. Of course, he had incidentally instructed Albedo and the battlemaids to stay in their positions.

“Let me ask you an important question. I am your creator, the person you are most loyal to, right?”

“Absolutely correct, Ainz-sama. I am your creation. Even if you ordered me to battle against the other Supreme Beings, I would not hesitate to give it my full effort!”

“Is that so… Well then, as a person.… No, as a man… Your master’s, whether it’s an order or a request, I don’t care. So please just stop it with the salutes. Okay?”

Pandora’s Actor’s empty eye-sockets stared straight at Ainz. His eyes spoke volumes to Ainz about his confusion. “Ah. That, how should I put it… Isn’t saluting strange? Let’s stop that. The military uniform… looks fine so there is no need to change that, but you really don’t need to salute anymore. Seriously, stop.”

“Wenn es meines Gottes Wille ist.”[2]

“…Is that German? Stop that too. Actually, that’s fine, but please, not in front of me. Please.”

“O-Okay.” As if this was the first time he had been overpowered, Pandora’s Actor gave a faint reply. Before he knew it, the distance between their faces had become close enough to kiss. Ainz pulled his face away and pleaded weakly: “Seriously, I’m begging you. I really didn’t think something like this would trigger my mind suppression. It’s even more embarrassing than riding a giant hamster… What the heck. I’d like to have a more calm conversation with you, but this is an emergency situation so this will be it for now.”

“Well then, there is something that must be done before entering the Mausoleum. Albedo, leave the ring of Ainz Ooal Gown I gave you with Pandora’s Actor.”

Ainz explained the reason for removing the ring to the puzzled-looking Albedo. “This is the final trap set up there. The golems inside, the ’Avatara’, are designed to attack all who wear the rings, even we are not exempt from this.”

“So that was the reason… Invaders would have used the rings to get here. Then, the final trap would absolutely have been triggered.”

“Very sinister, no?”

“No, no such thing!”

Albedo reluctantly removed the ring from her left ring finger, wrapped it in a scarf then passed it to Pandora’s Actor. Ainz who witnessed this also took off his ring, and placed it inside a ring box which had appeared from thin air. “Oh!” Ainz exclaimed as if he had just recalled something.

He took out a different ring of Ainz Ooal Gown that he kept in that space and placed it into the ring box. Because even if the rings were deposited into the storage space, it would still be

[2] German for “If that’s my God’s will.”

recognized as possessing the rings. Upon entering the Mausoleum they would be attacked by the Avataras.

"Albedo-sama… Could you please let go?" Hearing this helpless voice made Ainz turn around yet again to face Albedo and Pandora's Actor. What he saw was two people engaged in a tug-of-war over a scarf. "My, my precious…"

"Ainz-sama has already said it. Entering while wearing the ring will trigger the attack. It will only be a second until you're back here to retrieve it…"

"What are you saying! This is the ring Ainz-sama personally gave me! How could I… Woooooo—!"

"…Albedo, time is tight. If you will not voluntarily deposit the ring, I will…"

"Sorry, I'm ready!" Albedo suddenly released her grip, making Pandora's Actor lose his balance. He let out a surprised yell as he took a few steps backwards. "Right… Then let us head inside. Pandora's Actor, send Yuri and Shizu to move some of the treasures to the Throne Room… Although it is a little troublesome, but considering Albedo's mentality, don't use her ring. Use the one I gave you just now instead."

"I am extremely thankful to you, Ainz-sama! To think you would forbid others from using the ring that Ainz-sama have granted me. Of! Course! Since this is an emergency situation, I wasn't truly against it. I only wished to convey to Ainz-sama how highly I value the ring which Ainz-sama gifted me, but even without me demonstrating this, Ainz-sama has already observed—"

"Understood! …Well then, who should stay behind here to receive Ainz-sama when he returns?" Albedo, having had her self-appeal time cut short by Pandora's Actor, showed an expression a graceful beauty should never show. Ainz removed Albedo from his line of sight, not wishing for his mental image of the beauty to be shattered. "This should take some time. Afterwards, I will send you a 'Message'. Rush back here then, because without the rings we are unable to leave this place."

"Understood." As Pandora's Actor and the two maids bowed, Ainz took Albedo into the Mausoleum. This area which was only lit by dim lights was deathly silent— a suitable place for souls.

Ainz felt a little guilt for disturbing the tranquility of this place, but still asked the person beside him: "Right. Albedo, how much do you know about World class items?"

"Yes. Of what I know, they are the highest class treasures which the Supreme Beings have collected. Because of love, one of these treasures is now owned by me… That is about all that I know."

"Is that so. Then another day I shall write down all of the items that I know on paper, since it is safer for more people to know this information. Before that, I shall first tell you about the dangerous items."

Ainz spoke as he walked, telling Albedo about the World class items generally. World class items. These World class items were highly relevant to the Yggdrasil game world. The Yggdrasil World Tree was once covered with countless number of leaves, but one day a gigantic monster appeared

and devoured these leaves. As such, the leaves were destroyed one by one, until only nine were left. These nine leaves became the world's predecessors, called Asgard, Alfheim, Vanaheim, Nidavellir, Midgard, Jotunheim, Niflheim, Svartalfheim, and Muspelheim.

However, the monster which devoured the leaves of the World Tree relentlessly pursued these remaining nine leaves. This was the background story of the game: Players would step out into the unknown and face dangers in order to protect their own world. What then, did these World class items represent? They are equivalent to those leaves, that is to say, each World class item equals one world. Therefore, it was set up so that each World class item possessed an enormous amount of power. In fact, many World class items had extremely abnormal amounts of power.

There were many player opinions on the topic of whether or not such items were too damaging to the game's balance. However, the game development company issued the notice 'The possibilities of the world are not that small' and had no plans to update these Balance Breakers. As if the game development company placed a lot of sentiment on the phrase 'World', whether it was a player class or an enemy, those with the word 'World' in the name would be set up to be much more powerful than normal.

The final boss of the official campaign, 'Devourer of Nine Worlds', a beast that gained tremendous power from consuming the leaves and became the designated 'World Enemy.' The class granted only to the winner of the tournament, 'World Champion,' the one chosen by the nine worlds. Just as Ainz was explaining, the two people arrived at a place with neatly arranged armed statues placed in cavities on both the left and right sides.

This room had a similar atmosphere and magic as Lemegeton, the room before the Throne Room. However, golems in Lemegeton did not carry any weapons. In contrast, the statues here were all wearing super-powerful equipment, and their inherent strength was no less inferior to Ainz' main equipment. "Ai…Ainz-sama… Are these statues replicas of the Supreme Beings…"

"You've noticed. Correct, the Avatara are sculptures based on my past comrades. However… Just how did you recognize them? Their appearances are quite lacking. I don't think I've managed to capture even ten percent of their charm…"

"There is no way that a creation of the Supreme Beings would fail to recognize them."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that is how it is. However Ainz-sama… The name of this location, even these statues… Could it be that the other Supreme Beings have passed away?"

"That… Isn't quite it."

No, perhaps this really was the correct answer. Ainz stopped walking, silently gazing at these statues in contemplation. Not knowing how to interpret Ainz' silence, Albedo revealed an uneasy look. Seeing a beauty like her displaying such a look of grief, no man would be left unshaken.

Moreover, since it was the face of one of his past companion's creations, even the undead Ainz would feel guilty and become anxious. However, Ainz who neither had friends nor interacted

with women in real society before, could not think of any words of consolation. Feeling lost, Ainz frantically looked around him, searching for something to talk about.

At this moment, having found something, Ainz spoke without giving much thought: "L-Look over there. Do you see those four vacant spots?" Confirming that Albedo had turned to look in that direction, Ainz began a simplified explanation of why those places did not have statues. "One of those four is where I intend to place my Avatara." That was not true.

The one who created and placed these Avatara here was none other than Ainz himself. Because of this, if Ainz retired from the game, the fact that no other guild members remained meant that there would be nobody to place Ainz' Avatara here. His guild members said "It's for you," and transferred their own equipment and cash items to Ainz before retiring from the game. In memory of his retired comrades, and so that their gear may be worn once more, Ainz used cash items to create golems that were capable of donning equipment.

This is also the story behind why the Avatara looked so ugly. The information regarding the external appearances of the guild members was still saved within Pandora's Actor. However, by himself, Ainz did not have the ability nor skill to use this information to create decent-looking golems. Hence, he purchased the external appearance data and forcibly installed it on to the golems. The end result was that the limbs either grew fatter, or became shortened. The heads grew massive and clown-like, like monsters from nightmares.

However, this lack of cohesive unity in their appearances exuded a kind of strange atmosphere which gave people a strong sense of unease. Because of this, if Ainz kept in mind that they were meant to act as the final gatekeepers, he should consider it an unexpected stroke of luck. *How should I put this? The feeling is like looking at dolls made during childhood. It is rather embarrassing…*

Apart from the embarrassment, Ainz felt another intense emotion. That was loneliness. When his comrades retired from the game one after the other, Ainz decided to create the Avatara to be the caretakers of their equipment. When questioned by the guild members who had yet to retire, this was his reply. Perhaps it was for them to be the final caretakers.

But in reality, the reason that Ainz continued to create the Avatara while the member count diminished was simply because he was lonely. The members whom he played with all this time were disappearing. To show that the comrades in the Great Tomb of Nazarick and himself were together in life and in death, and to become their compensation, he built these Avatara.

It is the same story for why this place was named the Mausoleum. Its original name was the Secret Chamber of the Treasure Hall, but Ainz renamed it, in memory of the companions who departed from, or rather vanished from the Yggdrasil game. Hence this became their place of slumber. *…Even so, my heart still wishes to believe that my comrades were also sent to an unknown alien world, and they might still be in some corner of this world…*

Just as Ainz was being so pensive, a grieved shout penetrated through the entire passage. "Please don't—! Please don't say such a thing!" With the earlier feeling of solitude immediately blown away, Ainz hurriedly looked at Albedo. And was so surprised that he drew back. Albedo's eyes were filled with glistening tears, prepared to fall at even the slightest wink.

"…Ainz-sama. Compassionate Ainz-sama who remained until the end, to whom we devote our complete loyalty, please do not say such a thing! We sincerely hope that you can stay with us forever as our master!" Albedo kneeled before Ainz and lowered her face. Mixed with a choked voice, continuously repeating "Please… Please…" in a hoarse murmur, it sounded like a prayer, and at the same time, like a wail of grief and agony. In his entire life, Ainz had never seen someone pleading so desperately.

He never considered that such a casual joke would make Albedo so emotionally stricken. This filled Ainz with guilt, and he bent his knee and helped Albedo stand. "Forgive me." Had he not considered that he was abandoned by his past comrades before? When he was all alone in the Great Tomb of Nazarick, or every day that he felt disheartened because everybody was not around. Did he not feel anger because of his loneliness? Knowing this bitter feeling himself, why was he unable to understand Albedo's feelings, why did he allow Albedo to feel the same pain?

Albedo who got up and had cried herself into a mess long ago still had tears trickling down her cheeks. Ainz took out a handkerchief, and wiped away Albedo's tears clumsily and tenderly. "…" Although he wanted to apologize once more, he kept silent because he could not find the appropriate words to say. Because of his lack of skill with interpersonal relationships, he did not know what comforting words to say to stop her tears. Sobbing endlessly, Albedo made a request to the overwhelmed Ainz:

"Ai-Ainz-sama, please agree to me, promise to me that you will never abandon us and leave this place!"

"…I apologize, however…" After 'however', Ainz did not continue speaking. He had a particular reason for it, but Albedo assumed that his silence was due to something else.

"Why! Why can you not make that promise? Did you have thoughts about abandoning us already? Why! Is there something which makes you unhappy? If you would just explain, I will immediately remedy it! If you think of me as a hindrance, I shall immediately take my own life!"

"No!" Ainz shouted loudly. Taken by surprise, Albedo's shoulders jumped. "Hear me out. First, right now for example… There is no method which can save Shalltear. Shalltear's mind control is the effect of a World class item. That alone is absolute. The only way one would be able to resist the effects of a World class item is to either possess one yourself, or to have a special class."

While having her tears wiped like a child by Ainz, Albedo asked: "That's… That's why, you came here… Came here to take… Take the World class items, right?"

"Correct, in order to allow the Guardians to hold these World class item. Theoretically, using a similar type of World class item should make it possible to free Shalltear from her mind-control. However, I am hesitant about using the World class items inside here… Truly I am a worthless master, because I place more importance on mere items than on my loyal subjects."

"No, no such thing! The collected World class items are the results of the Supreme Beings' hard efforts, therefore they are more valuable than us!"

"…Is that so?"

If it were a game, Ainz would think so as well. Now, however, he was conflicted about this way of thinking. But then, facing this kind of situation, it was also true that Ainz had no method of using these trump cards. Among all of the balance-breaking World class items there were some called the 'Twenty'. These twenty were items unrivalled in terms of power. Of the 'Twenty', there was one particularly famous item named 'Longinus', capable of complete deletion of the target, but the price to pay for its use was the complete deletion of the user.

After having the data deleted by this World class item, unless another World class item was used for revival, there was no coming back. This was regardless of using cash items or having revival magic. If, for example, someone were to use such an item on an NPC of Nazarick, they would justify its use based on the NPC's level. This would remove the largest advantage of the base, the NPC's collective level amount.

Several similar insane items came to Ainz' mind. 'Ahura Mazda', capable of inflicting massively powerful effects on targets with a negative sense of justice across an entire world. 'Five Elemental Restriction', which could request the Yggdrasil developer company to change part of the Magic system. 'Ouroboros', which had an even greater scope than 'Five Elemental Restriction', was able to request the Game Developer Company to change a part of the game itself. And finally, the most powerful World class item 'World Savior'.

Normally it had the strength of an ordinary club, but it had an unlimited growth potential. Thus even during the time the Great Tomb of Nazarick had been at its peak, with all guild members present, it would take just a single enemy with this item to defeat the entire place. These items called the 'Twenty' were so powerful that they could only be used once before disappearing. As such, it would be regrettable to consume their use even if they were trump cards.

Ainz Ooal Gown took pride in being the owner of two of the 'Twenty', thus they could only be used against an opponent which used an item of the same class, because only an item of the same class would be worthy of its use. Therefore if it vanished, it would be well spent. But what if after it vanished, it fell to the possession of someone else, and furthermore an enemy of Nazarick? What then? Nazarick was protected by these World class weapons, therefore internally it would not be affected. But if this was not managed well, perhaps opponents would invade the entrance. Therefore these World class items could not be used. It was necessary to find another method to rescue Shalltear.

"Albedo, thank you for what you have just said. Let me tell you why I fell silent earlier." With past human emotions still lingering inside him, Ainz took a deep breath like he would were he still living, because he knew that the following statement would be of utmost importance.

"I plan to fight Shalltear alone. As such… I do not know if I may return alive…"

"…I understand that it is necessary to fight Shalltear, because leaving her as she is would be a bad idea!" Ainz had the same thoughts in mind. It was not known why the enemy had not given orders to Shalltear. If however the opponent were to give such a command, things would soon become difficult, because everything about Nazarick could be exposed to the whole world.

"But then, why must it be a solo fight? Can we not win with numbers? Are we incapable of helping you with this?" Once again wiping off Albedo's welling tears, Ainz replied: "That is

untrue, Albedo. I trust you deeply. The only thing is… This, there are three reasons. Firstly, I have doubts whether I am the most suitable to be the master."

"Ainz-sama, how could you say this?"

Ainz raised his hand to interrupt Albedo. "…Thinking over it calmly, accounting for the possibility that players exist in this world, it is only right to also consider that there is the possibility that World class items also exist. Therefore someone who only caught on so slowly like me, isn't it questionable whether I am worthy of being a ruler? Isn't it questionable whether I am qualified to lead everybody?"

"Ainz-sama has value simply by being here! Even if there is something lacking, we will all fully support you!"

"Thank you, but I am still the one who should bear the full responsibility for this incident."

If this world really did have something like Longinus, using a villager to completely delete a Guardian was a very real possibility. Although Shalltear being mind-controlled was not a pleasant turn of events, from a different perspective, it was perhaps fortunate, considering that the situation could have been much more dangerous.

"You mean to say that your solo fight with Shalltear is your way of repenting? …Just who could possibly punish you Ainz-sama, the Supreme Ruler of Nazarick!?"

"That is not the only issue. The second reason… Shalltear was all alone in that place. It is very likely that it will be a trap, and a deadly one at that."

Seeing Albedo confused, Ainz continue to explain: "When we, Ainz Ooal Gown, were PK'ing, our methods and Shalltear's current situation are very similar. We also allow guild members to be become the bait, and hunt the baited hunter. Of course the possibility of the bait being killed is very high, but we always guarantee that the enemy who attacked was eliminated."

"In that case, Ainz-sama…!"

"One moment, I am not done explaining. Do you know what we feared the most in our traps?"

Not waiting for a response, Ainz took the initiative to reveal the answer: "That was if the number of attackers were less than the number of bait. If the baited number was few, we had to be wary of whether the opponent had also set up an ambush. We needed to ascertain if setting up this trap was within the opponent's calculations."

Seeing comprehension dawn on Albedo's face, Ainz still took in a breath despite being physically incapable of doing so. "And the final reason, is because I will kill Shalltear."

"In that case then allow me! I who have received a World class item is the most suitable for this task."

"…Do you have a chance of winning? Do not lie to me and tell me what the best odds for your victory are." Seeing the calm look in Ainz' stare, Albedo unwillingly bit her lip. "Albedo… Your way of thinking isn't wrong. Shalltear is very powerful."

Shalltear Bloodfallen. She is the strongest Guardian in the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Even Albedo… No, even the other level 100 NPCs are not her equal. “Because of this… I am the one who shall go. The only person who is able to fight Shalltear and win is me.”

“T-This… If it is Ainz-sama’s equipment, perhaps it is sufficient to defeat her, but then…”

Ainz who was fully clothed in Divine class equipment and was even using cash items, against Shalltear who only had her one Divine class equipment, Spuit Lance. From the perspective of equipment, Ainz had an absolute advantage. However, Ainz left out telling Albedo that there was also a reason why his victory chances were not high.

Ainz was well aware of that reason. That was because Shalltear Bloodfallen was Ainz Ooal Gown’s absolute nemesis. The character Ainz was roleplaying as was an ‘Undead Magician’, with a build specializing in necromancy. This class build was also purely for entertainment. Shalltear’s job build was, however, rigorously specialized. Not only that, Shalltear’s divine based magic caster class had several skills which could be used against undead magic, and was also proficient in melee fights.

In light of this, there was already a large gap between the two, not to mention that Ainz’ forte in necromancy was ineffective against the undead Shalltear. Ainz was proficient in areas which were ineffective against Shalltear, who specialized in dealing with the undead. Additionally, about Ainz’ equipment, if a situation arose in which all of his equipment was taken away, Ainz’ chances of winning in a confrontation between the two of them would be slim.

No, there would be absolutely no chance of victory. “Are you trying to say that the situation is not favorable to me?” Albedo lowered her head as Ainz hit the mark. That is perhaps so, even Ainz was in agreement. He should not be able to defeat Shalltear. However—

Just to let you understand, as the one who you refer to as the Supreme Ruler of Nazarick, my title isn’t just for show. “…Your way of thinking is quite right, but flawed as well. What you all possess is merely indoctrinated knowledge.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Do you have experience?”

“What? Experience?” Albedo blushed. “Yes, battle experience.”

“Ah! That’s what you meant! Yes, I am able to put all of the powers conferred to me by the Supreme Beings into good use. Therefore, it should be seen as being pretty experienced.”

Ainz shook his head in disagreement with Albedo’s answer. When he fought against the woman called Clementine, he had received a lot of inspiration. “Incorrect. Being able to utilize power to its fullest and being experienced are two different issues. Do you remember that time in the past when Nazarick was being invaded by a large number of enemies, that scene where Shalltear was fighting against the opponents?”

“Although I did not pay my utmost attention when listening to the details, but she seemed to have said that she vaguely remembered dying.”

"…And anything else?" Albedo shook her head to indicate no.

"Against solo invaders, it was usually us who went to deal with them… Having such a stingy character has been a great help this day. Well then, it is still me who will handle this, I who have the highest chance of winning shall do the confrontation." Ainz grinned. Of course, his face did not move at all. However, Albedo seemed to have sensed the Supreme Ruler's smile, and had flushed cheeks like a young maiden who caught sight of her admired man. Ainz declared war on someone not present.

"I am the one known as the Guildmaster of Ainz Ooal Gown. When engaging in PVP, the actual chance of victory is high… Invincible against even those with flawless builds. How can I lose to the type of person who solely relies on their created attributes. Furthermore, the most important fact is the strong bond I have with Peroroncino. Know that this battle was over even before it had begun… Shalltear."

"…Ainz-sama, I will no longer stop you. However, promise me that you will return safely." Ainz silently watched Albedo, then nodded slowly. "I promise you, I shall defeat Shalltear and return."

Part 2

Arriving in a world of green, Ainz surveyed his surroundings. He then smiled at the fact that checking for people in the vicinity was the first thing he did after the transfer. If there was actually someone whom Ainz should be alert of, he would have long been under attack and there would be no way he could take his time like this. The transfer destination was at least two kilometers away from Shalltear's position, just as a precaution.

Although it was already checked through the use of magic, there was no way of being certain that the person who had used a World class item to subject Shalltear to mind-control was not nearby. However this concern was unfounded. Ainz lowered his shoulders and turned to look at the two persons who were following from behind.

"Let us split up here." He instructed Aura and Mare. Considering the fierce battle to come, Ainz only permitted these two to accompany him. He had already rescinded his previous commands, allowing the majority of those operating outside to return to Nazarick. Apart from Aura and Mare, Sebas and Solution were the only members of Nazarick who were currently outside.

The main reason for choosing these two people was to psychologically take advantage of the enemy's emotional weakness in battle. Because Aura and Mare's humanoid race was different from Demiurge's and Cocytus' heteromorphic race, perhaps the opponent would stay their hand and be unable to bear killing such adorable humanoid children. Of course, the opponent could also be a cold-blooded killer. Regardless, in order to prepare for the unexpected, he wanted someone to be placed nearby.

Although it may also be an unhelpful bad chess move instead. Ainz looked at the two dual-colored, differently shaped metal gloves that Mare wore. The metal glove on the right hand looked like an angel's hand, smooth and releasing a silver-white brilliance. The metal glove on the left hand however, was like that of a demon's, covered with spikes and hooked claws and emitting a red glow from lava-like cracks.

Following this, Ainz turned to Aura, looking at the scroll hanging at her waist. "…If the enemy matches our number or outnumbers us, immediately retreat to Nazarick."

"…Understood." Aura wore a stiff expression as she nodded in response, while Mare followed suit and quickly bowed his head.

"Listen well. It is absolutely crucial that you retreat, because that's part of my plan as well… Also, what I have given to you are Nazarick's secret treasures and you cannot allow them to be snatched away under any circumstances. Depending on the situation, you must consider them to be more important than your own lives. Understood?" Ainz cautioned them like this. He felt a bit uncomfortable about Aura, who hesitated before responding, because it could become a fatal problem if her loyalty caused her to disobey her order.

Hearing the two people's response — an energetic and a timid one — Ainz harbored some doubts. *To be honest to myself, which is more important to me?* Planning to save Shalltear, yet refusing to use World class items to do so. From this perspective, it could be said that the items were more important.

But the reason for refusing to use World class items was what he told Albedo in the Treasure Hall. They were the final trump card and had the power to change defeat into victory in any situation. It's another matter if there was no other way to save Shalltear, but since there was still a way, it was the wiser decision not to use it.

Leaving that aside: the faithful servants, who had been created by his companions and became sentient and loyal NPCs, or the World class Items who were the very symbol of adventuring and had elevated Ainz Ooal Gown's standing in the game Yggdrasil; which one was more important?

Unable to find the answer despite giving it much thought, Ainz was troubled. If it were before coming to this world, he could decisively give an answer, but now he was perplexed. The guild members shed a lot of blood, sweat, and tears during the design process, carefully crafting what would eventually become these NPCs that showed emotion.

Because I currently plan to kill this… This NPC who is like our child… Planning to kill Peroroncino's daughter. Ainz was troubled. It could also be described as a sense of guilt. However—

Ainz stared sharply in the direction of Shalltear's probable position. "To break the control of a World class item, this is the only way." These words were blurted to convince himself. Seeing the worried look in Aura and Mare's eyes, Ainz felt that letting these two continue to worry was not helpful and changed the subject.

"Well then, you two go cooperate with them and do a good job scouting the surroundings." Ainz' finger was pointed at four masses of flesh floating in front. They were about two meters in diameter and the body was pink in color. These monsters also had countless murky eyes which looked like they were haphazardly sewn together using eyes removed from the carcasses of many different types of creatures.

They were undead created using the spell 'Create High-tier Undead', known as Eyeball Corpses. Ainz used his maximum number of summons per day to create these Eyeball Corpses because they had a hidden ability, the nemesis of magic and special ability users.

Those cloudy eyes were not mere decoration, but had excellent visual capability, perhaps matching or even exceeding that of Aura's vision as a ranger. Although their offensive power was low, their value this time was in their surveillance rather than combat, with the purpose of assisting Aura.

"Understood! However, will they obediently listen to my commands?"

"Not a problem. I can assure you on this point. In addition, I will use magic to help telepathically link you together. This way you can be at the center of command and patrol safely."

"Yes! Although it will be faster if I act personally, we do not know what kind of forces the opponent has! I understand now! Then after Mare uses magic to increase our stealth, we shall prepare the ambush in this area."

"No problems then, I leave it in your care." Ainz silently revealed an invisible smile

♦ ♦ ♦

Demiurge, who was the last to enter the room, quickly walked inside and went straight to a vacant seat to sit down. Normally, he was never one to display such rough behavior, his mood was already fully conveyed without the need for explanation. "So, care to explain yourself?" Demiurge closed his eyes and fiercely asked Albedo, who was one of the people seated around the same table.

"Why would you agree to this?" Although his voice was steady, it was thinly veiled, everyone was able to hear the sharp undertone. People would feel more agitated when a normally calm person showed strong emotions because the dichotomy was substantial. However this was not the case this time because Demiurge's expression was extremely anxious, and even his companions had never seen him so worked up before.

However, blatantly facing this hostility and question filled with murderous intent, Albedo remained as her usual self. "Wasn't that Ainz-sama's decision? How could we subordinates defy…"

"…Why?" A question as sharp as a knife interrupted Albedo's speech. "Why? When Ainz-sama headed towards the human city, you were the one who vehemently insisted that a Guardian accompany him. Why would you agree to the matter this time? At that moment you should have also been concerned about Ainz-sama's safety." Albedo nodded in reply, and Demiurge's expression contorted.

"Well then, I will ask again! Why did you agree to this?" It was almost as if the room was vibrating in anger. This was completely unlike an emotion that Demiurge would show. Cocytus slowly turned his head and gazed worriedly at the two people. "…Furthermore, shouldn't you have known that Ainz-sama was lying?" Demiurge asked in a low tone suppressed with anger.

After Albedo nodded once again, Cocytus mouth moved with a metallic sound. Both persons knew that this crisp and high-pitched noise was often made when Cocytus had questions. Albedo explained: "…A short time ago, I told you what Ainz-sama told me, the reason why he went ahead by himself. Didn't you find this strange? From Ainz-sama's reasoning, wouldn't it be safer to attack in waves? Wouldn't it be safer if we were to attack one by one and slowly reduce Shalltear's stamina and magic?"

"…It is as she says, Cocytus. A tactic that we can easily come up with, there is no way that Ainz-sama overlooked this. In other words, Ainz-sama has deliberately lied to hide a greater reason."

"What is this reason?"

"I don't know… Which is why I ask, Albedo. If you already knew this, why did you still allow Ainz-sama to go forth alone?"

"Because the Ainz-sama a few days ago and the Ainz-sama right now are like two completely different people." Demiurge who was squinting and now slightly opened his eyes had a thoroughly confused expression, telling Albedo to continue explaining. "Back then, Ainz-sama didn't have an expression like a man, but… How should I put it… Although I know it comes across as disrespectful, but at that moment his expression was like a child who wished to run away."

"I didn't sense that? Could it be that you were mistaken?" Demiurge looked slightly away and towards the direction of the 'Crystal Screen'. It showed the clear image of their master walking through the woods.

"You think so? I don't think that I would misread the expression on the man I love…" Albedo's eyes also turned towards the 'Crystal Screen', and she had the expression of an intoxicated woman. This expression irritated the anxious Demiurge. "Then! What is his expression now?"

"The current Ainz-sama has a determined look on his face. As a woman, perhaps this way of thinking is disrespectful, but knowing that my beloved master wishes to carry out that determination, I will not get in his way. Furthermore, Ainz-sama has already promised to me that he will definitely return safely."

Seeing that Albedo was not planning to say anything further, Demiurge asked disdainfully and with a displeased look: "This is still too irrational, naive; a purely emotional judgment. Ainz-sama is the last Supreme Being who remains here. Knowing that he faces a situation where his life may be in peril, it is our responsibility to come up with a plan to remove that danger. Even if we will be blamed afterwards, even if we will have to sacrifice our lives, we ought to step forward and act, right?"

With a loud bumping noise, Demiurge stood up. "Where do you think you're going?" The voice that called out to Demiurge's turned back was eerily calm. "You're still asking something so obvious? Of course to send out my subordinates—" Noticing the sharp sound of metal closing in, Demiurge turned his head and saw an unsheathed blade, it was Cocytus' Divine class item.

"…I see… Calling me back and at the same time commanding me to be here, was it for this, Albedo?"

"Correct Demiurge… The seventh floor is already in lockdown under both Ainz-sama and my authority, and all of your subordinates are in our grasp. You or Ainz-sama, it doesn't need to be said whose orders they will obey, no?"

"…Truly a fool. If Ainz-sama meets his death because of this, how do you plan to take responsibility! Ainz-sama is our last object of loyalty!"

"Ainz-sama will definitely return."

"What proof do you have for your assurance?!"

Demiurge glared. That pair of eyes lacked eyeballs. In fact it was completely without pupil or iris, but were shining jewels with numerous small cuts. "To believe in our masters, this is also part of our obligation as their creations." Demiurge repeatedly opened and closed his mouth. And eventually, tightly closed his eyes shut. Because he also reckoned that… That too is correct.

All of the Nazarick NPCs, who were absolutely loyal to the 41 Supreme Beings, had subtle differences in the way they demonstrated their obedience. On the issue of loyalty, of course Demiurge and Albedo had different approaches. However, Albedo's concept of loyalty gave Demiurge a huge shock.

But even so, he was still worried and his restlessness would not disappear. It was why, in the past, they spoke of a descendant to carry on his will. If Ainz-sama were to disappear like the other Supreme Beings, to whom should they be loyal to from that day onwards? For us who were created to be loyal to them, after this value was lost then what would be the meaning of existence?

As if to hide his own emotions, Demiurge rudely sat on the chair again, not one bit like his usual self. "If… Anything should happen to Ainz-sama, you must discard your position as Overseer of the Guardians."

"…Demiurge you dare telling Albedo to step down from a position bestowed upon her by the Supreme Beings? Such insolence!"

Albedo smiled at the shocked Cocytus. "No problem. However, Demiurge, if Ainz-sama returns safely, you will have to obediently follow my commands should any similar situation arise in the future."

"Of course."

"Well then, Cocytus, what do you think are Ainz-sama's chances of winning?" Cocytus reluctantly told the other two his personal judgment. "Thirty to seventy. Ainz-sama is thirty." Demiurge's shoulders could not help but give a jump. For Cocytus, the strongest warrior amongst them, to say something so ominous, there was no way Demiurge could ignore this. However Albedo had a different reaction. Upon hearing this statement, she revealed a beaming smile as she fully grasped the situation with ease. "Is that so. Then let's wait and see how Ainz-sama turns the tables to obtain victory."

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After splitting up with the two people, Ainz walked towards Shalltear's position. Thanks to his own special abilities, he was able to differentiate between north, south, east and west, and stuck to a straight line through the woods when heading towards Shalltear. Passing through the trees, Ainz caught sight of Shalltear. It saddened him to see that Shalltear looked just the same as before, like a doll. At the same time he felt anger towards himself, but an even greater anger at the World class item user.

“Damn.” He cursed softly, but his voice was filled with strong emotions. Even the undead Ainz who was capable of suppressing emotional turbulence was unable to repress this. “In order to find my companions, I have to spread the name and fame of Ainz Ooal Gown through any means, no matter how unscrupulous. But I still maintained discretion in order to avoid such meaningless battles. How did something like this happen?”

Who was it? Just what kind of power was used? Why use a World class item against Shalltear? He did not have the slightest clue. “…No matter who the opponent is, if they managed to extract information from Shalltear… I will have to kill them without fail.”

Within Ainz, intense dark emotions surfaced. From within gushed out such fierce hostility and murderous intent, such that even a skull which ought to be incapable of movement looked significantly distorted. “I will definitely make you deeply regret your own foolishness. Do not think you can get away so easily when you anger us, Ainz Ooal Gown.”

After speaking out his inner fury, Ainz gradually reverted back to his usual composure. The real battle was about to start. It was crucial that he kept calm. “I am still stupid, there are better methods at hand.” Ainz revealed a self-deprecating smile. “…Is it guilt? Or do I not willingly face… Only wishing to avoid confronting…”

Although Shalltear was the strongest Guardian, the difference was minimal. If the other Guardians took turns to attack, victory was certain. However Ainz did not choose this method for a single reason. That was because he did not wish to personally witness his beloved children mutually killing each other. If the opponent had voluntarily betrayed Ainz Ooal Gown, Ainz would frankly accept the fact of her rebellion and use all means at disposal to extinguish her. If that was the NPC’s own volition, as Nazarick’s ruler, treating her with severity was only appropriate.

If the betrayal were because of the setting, he would find the most compromising method. However, Shalltear this time was different. She had been mind-controlled, and the person in the wrong was Ainz for not considering this situation. That is why only he could shoulder this responsibility. He wished to personally handle this. Ainz took off a ring, a cash item that allowed revival for several times without any cost. Removing this item represented Ainz’ steadfast resolve, because if he were able to revive, he would be less focused.

It’s not a sign of him giving up. Determined, Ainz looked up at the sky. “Up until now the enemy has still chosen not to attack. Right now, I can only sense the surveillance magic from Nazarick… Is the enemy not watching?” Normally, Ainz would use a large variety of defensive magic. The counterintelligence magic activated in Carne village was one such type. In Yggdrasil, because friendly fire was rendered ineffective, his companions could use intelligence magic on Ainz and locate him with ease. However this world was different. If Albedo and the others wished to observe Ainz, he would automatically counter with magic.

Thus, the counter magic would be an attack to Nazarick’s security net. If he was careless, Ainz could face the retaliation from the security net and suffer unnecessary damage. Therefore Ainz disabled the automatic countering magic, only leaving behind that which could detect the source of the intelligence magic. From that information, he gathered that aside from Nazarick, there were no others who were using magic to watch Ainz at this moment.

Ainz tilted his head quizzically. *Could it be that Shalltear being abandoned here was really a coincidence?* "Furthermore… Didn't Albedo see through my lies? Oh dear, oh dear. Setting that aside… Do you not feel that this is quite a gamble, Shalltear?" Needless to say, the expressionless Shalltear did not respond. Ainz looked at Shalltear and readied himself for battle, but a tiny part of himself wished to escape this situation.

Even if he had just intonated his determination, when standing here and facing the reality of the situation, he still felt a tremendous amount of pressure. Even if he had mentally prepared to heroically put his life on the line… No, because he had the determination to die, the cowardly spirit left behind by the man, Satoru Suzuki, would feel fear. The battle that would ensue was not going to be slash-and-kill like in the Yggdrasil game, but a genuine fight to the death.

The battles he had fought ever since first arriving in this world, this would not be like his fights against Nigan and Clementine, where an overwhelming difference in power guaranteed his victory. This time it would be life or death, and furthermore a battle under an absolute disadvantage. If he was not an undead, and—

"If I wasn't the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, and also not the representative of the Guild, perhaps I would not be able to even raise my fist." Ainz laughed out loud, and like this, pushed aside all of his negative emotions. The fear of death had already vanished without a trace. Even the anxiety of defeat had disappeared. Recalling pride and glory endowed Ainz with strength.

"I am Ainz Ooal Gown. With that name at stake, there can be no defeat." Being able to prove that he was the master of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, this position was not merely an empty title. Ainz' sharp eyes looked towards the unprepared Shalltear. "…Well then… Let us begin!" Ainz shouted loudly, activating his magic. From his large collection of spells, he carefully selected, the 10th tier defensive magic to be activated. 'Body of Effulgent Beryl'. Ainz' white skeletal body began to emit a green glow. Following this—

"Ha ha ha!" During the activation of his magic, Ainz laughed out loudly while not taking his eyes off Shalltear. Because in addition to the satisfaction felt from his predictions proving to be accurate, he had also won a large gamble. "So I was right! Unless my actions are seen as completely hostile, then the NPC will not ready itself for battle! It is exactly the same as in the game!"

Her behavior mirrored that of mind controlled monsters in Yggdrasil. The game logic also applied to this world, which slightly eased this absolutely unfavorable situation. "Since it's like this, Shalltear, I hope you will not mind but before the battle I shall kindly request that you remain still and wait a while longer."

Ainz continued to activate different magic, — 'Flight', 'Magic Caster's Blessing', 'Infinity Wall', 'Magic Ward: Holy', 'Life Essence', 'Greater Full Potential', 'Freedom', 'False Data: Life', 'See Through', 'Paranormal Intuition', 'Greater Resistance', 'Mantle of Chaos', 'Indomitability', 'Sensory Boost', 'Greater Luck', 'Magic Boost', 'Draconic Power', 'Greater Hardening', 'Heavenly Aura', 'Absorption', 'Penetration Boost', 'Greater Magic Shield', 'Mana Essence', 'Triple Maximize Magic: Explosive Land Mine', 'Triple Maximize Magic: Greater Magic Seal', 'Triple Maximize Magic: Magic Arrow' — like this, an almost endless amount of magic surrounded Ainz' body.

“Now, here I come!” Upon finishing his preparations, those words were thrown at both Shalltear and himself. The first magic which Ainz selected was an ultimate move, a spell surpassing the 10th tier. It was called Super-tier magic—

In terms of magic tier, it was a magic already beyond the tier system. It could be considered as both magic and not magic. Firstly, there is no mana used when it is activated. However there was a limit on the number of times that it could be activated per day. When it was first learnt, it could only be used once a day. However beyond level seventy, it could be used one more time per day for every additional ten levels. The number you could learn is one for each level. Rather than magic, it could be more appropriate to consider it a special skill.

That was also to say that the average player who reached level 100 could only use Super-tier magic four times. So then you may wonder, wouldn’t Shalltear be defeated through the continuous use of Super-tier magic? Indeed, the destructive power between Super-tier magic and 10th tier magic was not comparable. If only it were possible to continuously use Super-tier magic, even in terms of a simple calculation of aggregate damage, only a handful of level 100 players could survive. This would not include Shalltear, thus she would be defeated.

However it was not so simple. Because Super-tier magic could not be activated consecutively. Firstly, every Super-tier magic has a set activation period. Although it was possible to use cash items to remove this activation period, there was another penalty which prevented Super-tier magic from being cast continuously. When members of a small group activated Super-tier magic, all of the members would be affected by this penalty, there would be a period of time during which it was impossible to re-cast Super-tier magic, called the cool-down time.

This kind of penalty setting was designed for Guild wars, so that during wars, one side could not obtain victory by continuously activating Super-tier magic. In addition, neither cash items nor special abilities were able to remove this cool-down. As such, in PVPs, any person who activated Super-tier magic off the bat was often recognized as an idiot. Because using the only trump card without fully understanding the opponent’s ins and outs often spelt defeat. In fact during PVPs, obtaining victory by using Super-tier magic at the start of battle was rare.

However, Ainz’ first move was Super-tier magic. There was no anxiety or confusion on that face, only a calm light in those empty eye sockets. A huge three-dimensional, dome shaped magic about ten meters in radius was activated with Ainz at the center. The magic emitted a white light, and texts or marks of translucent patterns floated into existence.

These patterns were continuously shifting and dazzling to look at, changing shape every second. If cash items were used, the Super-tier magic could be activated instantaneously, yet Ainz did not do so. His eyesight moved away from Shalltear and turned to survey the surroundings. “No ambush…? Or are they still standing by the side-lines? Surely this moment should be the best opportunity for them to attack?”

A magic casters’ defensive abilities would drop when activating Super-tier magic. Furthermore all the caster has to suffer is a certain amount of damage for the magic to be automatically cancelled. As such, basically every time Super-tier magic was activated, there would be several companions to protect the caster. That also meant that now was the perfect time to attack the unprotected Ainz.

However, there was no change in the surroundings. “Could it be that I was overcautious?” Ainz smiled then shrugged. Although it had only been a hunch, by now Ainz was certain that Shalltear hadn’t been placed there as bait, she had truly been discarded. “Seriously, what happened here. Hey, I’m not omniscient, of course I do not possess the power to see through everything. If I did, then the situation wouldn’t have become like this.”

After muttering to himself, Ainz put on an act of twisting his shoulders. When activating Super-tier magic, it was also impossible to move freely, only to stand like a wooden statue waiting for time to pass. In order to make use of the time, Ainz took out a curved metal plate from thin air. It fixated firmly to his arm after he put it there. The metal plate had a row of numbers which changed with every passing second.

Without the need for further explanation, it was a wristwatch. Ainz put his thumb on the metal plate, touching the text on the display. “Momonga-oniichan! I’m setting the time!” A voice pretending to be a naive girl penetrated the surroundings. This kind of voice would seriously make people nearby raise their eyebrows. “…Why can’t this watch’s voice be turned off…” Ainz voiced out a complaint, but this was merely postulation. The voice could be turned off in the settings, but Ainz had never turned it off.

The watch’s voice was from the creator of Aura and Mare, the Guild member Bukubuku Chagama. If he turned off her voice, this item would be no different from an ordinary watch. The reason why she would put her efforts into making such a voice which would make others raise eyebrows, was mainly to make fun of Ainz. The creator of Shalltear Bloodfallen, Peroroncino, was her younger brother, who was on good terms with Ainz. As such, Bukubuku Chagama saw Ainz as her younger brother’s friend, leading to this result.

However, it might not be a prank either. She would often perform voice acting for the role of loli characters in H-Games. The weird voice just now was also that of a loli. Therefore she may only be using her work-related voice inside. Realizing that he might come across his sister’s voice when he set out to purchase H-Games, his desire to go through with the purchase declined rapidly. Remembering his companion’s complaints on this issue in the past, Ainz smiled.

“…I agree. If I heard Bukubuku Chagama’s voice when browsing the internet, I would be shocked too.” After his demonstration of affection towards his absent Guild friends, he proceeded to pull out several flat sticks approximately fifteen centimeters long each from thin air. Each plank had carved words, inscribed with ‘Tsukuyomi’, ‘Bow of Houyi’, ‘Earth Recovery’, ‘The Female Sensei’s Iron Fist of Wrath’.

On his waist there were several slots for holding scrolls. He silently memorized the order of these compartments, then carefully and slowly placed the sticks inside. These preparations took a while, and by the time they were complete the magic’s blue light was even stronger. It was at the state where it could be launched. “Then, let us begin.” Having prepared himself, Ainz revealed a look of determination—

“Super-tier magic— 「Fallen Down」!”

5章 PVN

Player VS Non-Player Character

Part 1

A noise could be heard, a sound like sticking a burning torch into a pool of water. The magic that transcends tiers, it was as if the sun had manifested on the earth's surface, dyeing the surroundings in white. The deadly heat born from the tremendous temperature expanded in an instant and greedily devoured everything within its area of effect. This scene of certain death probably lasted around five seconds. However, it felt dozens of times longer.

Before long, traces of the white world disappeared. After the heat dissipated, the effect had drawn a circle that completely changed the surrounding scenery. Outside the area of effect, everything was left untouched. The trees remained the same and the land teemed with life, thanks to the nearby forest. It was the unchanged, the normal world.

On the other hand, everything inside the circle had been charred black, a surreal land of death. The immense heat had obliterated all the plants in the area, and only smoldering tree trunks remained. Amongst the blackened surface, there were spots where the land had turned vitreous. Even now, pillars of smoke were scattered about. Ainz stood just barely outside the area that permitted no survivors. From within that area, he felt a ghastly presence pierce through his body.

The source was just one person. Who else could survive temperatures that eradicated all life? "Kaka— Ahahaha—." A strange voice mixed with a grinding noise, an unimaginable sound that made one clench their teeth, flowed into Ainz' ears. The sound had come from the crimson spot in the world of black. With smoke rising from her body, as if to say that this wasn't enough to kill her, Shalltear Bloodfallen laughed. Her scarlet eyes were filled with killing intent as she glared directly at Ainz.

"Ainz-sa–ma—! That was pretty painful—!" Shalltear slowly placed one foot forward, forming a crack along the charred earth. She closed her distance to Ainz by a step, then another, and swung the Spuit Lance she held in one hand. The sound as it cut through the air was a testament of the fact that she could still fight.

A magic caster displayed his true strength in a long range battle. For Ainz, who was not strong in close combat, narrowing the distance would only put him at a disadvantage. However, instead of quickly retreating, he spoke to Shalltear with an imposing attitude, like a champion waiting for his challenger.

"It was a boring gift, but how did you like it Shalltear?"

"Ahahahahaha!' From the bottom of her heart, Shalltear laughed happily. "It was amazing! I can't believe I have to kill someone with such tremendous power, Ainz-sama!"

"…'sama' you say… Shalltear, why do you still address me with honorifics? Who is your current master?"

“You say some strange things. It’s obvious that I would call you Ainz-sama, the Supreme Ruler. And my master right now is…”

Shalltear wore a large frown. It was a look of confusion. “…Why am I fighting with Ainz-sama? No, that’s not it? Because I was attacked? But why did Ainz-sama attack me? …Because I was attacked, I have to use my full strength and kill? Why?” Before long, as if Shalltear had come to some conclusion, the smile from before returned to her face. “I don’t really understand, but since Ainz-sama attacked me, I have to kill you!”

“…I see. …I understand your condition now…”

“Ara? What’s wrong, Ainz-sama? You seem tired. Do you think you can win against me like that?”

“Hmph. You seem to be misunderstanding something. Do you truly believe that I, Ainz Ooal Gown, will lose to the likes of you? There is no defeat for ‘Ainz Ooal Gown’. Shalltear, you will be the one to kneel before me.”

“Ahahahahaha! How scary—!”

With a speed that would make even the wind seem slow in comparison, Shalltear closed in, filled with bloodlust. Every step caused the charred earth beneath her to explode. Clementine had been fast, but Shalltear was at a different level altogether. Ainz was thankful for his body that did not need to blink. If he had blinked even once, he would have lost track of her.

With the sound of laughter trailing behind her, Shalltear’s lance flew in his direction. Originally, a Lance Charge had the weight and speed of a knight on horseback behind it. However, with her strength and speed that was in a different league and left others agape, Shalltear easily surpassed the power of such an attack. Even calling it an ultimate skill did not do it justice. Such an attack was heading straight for Ainz’ chest.

Even as the point of the lance flew towards him, Ainz did not budge. Rather, he opened his mouth and said gently: “It will be dangerous for you.” A voice overflowing with concern, as if he was worried on Shalltear’s behalf; a word of warning was his response against her attack. The moment Shalltear brought down her foot, the spell that had been prepared beforehand, ‘Triple Maximize Magic: Explosive Land Mine’ was activated. Three large explosions roared out and Shalltear was blown back.

Once again, Ainz spoke in a gentle voice: “Forgive me for being late with the warning, Shalltear. In truth, I’ve laid some mines there, 「Maximize Magic: Gravity Maelstrom」.” Aiming at Shalltear who had been blown away, Ainz launched a sphere that drew a black spiral. It was a spinning ball of super gravity that could deal significant damage even to beings like Shalltear.

She immediately recovered her balance and raised her free hand. “「Wall of Stone」.” A huge stone wall sprouted from the ground and surrounded Shalltear. It collided with Ainz’ ball of super gravity. The stone bent and shattered and was destroyed along with the gravity spiral. “Hmph! 「Maximize Magic: Rib Bind」!” Another attack. A large ribcage sprouted from the earth and, like a tiger trap, seized Shalltear. The pointed ends of the pale bone pierced deeply through her flesh.

"Ugh!" Although the spell was supposed to keep the target constricted after the initial damage, Shalltear easily slipped away, thanks to her complete immunity to movement impairing effects. "…Shalltear, it looks like I've forgotten to mention that I laid traps in the surrounding area. Wouldn't it be a better idea for you to attack me from the air?"

"…Ainz-sama, I won't fall for that. You probably have traps in the air as well, no?"

"Was it obvious?"

"Yes, very." The two shared a light laugh, and the intensity of Ainz' red eyes dulled slightly.

There was no way that was true. Ainz did not have any more landmine magic prepared. He also didn't set up any traps in the air either. This wasn't a battle where he could carelessly use his mana. He couldn't afford the luxury of spending his mana on spells that might prove ineffective. That's why his claim of having set up traps in the ground was a bluff to restrict Shalltear's movements. His eyes had changed slightly because she walked right into it.

Even so, Ainz did not show any sign of relief. In this battle, Ainz was the challenger. It was an uphill struggle, like walking on an incredibly thin rope with the possibility that he would slip and fall extremely high. Knowing this, Ainz did not celebrate such a small victory.

"But as expected of Ainz-sama. A simple charge like that won't even let me close the distance." An endless stream of compliments could be felt from Shalltear's eyes and voice. At the same time, accompanied by the feeling that she was going to be serious. *The real battle starts now.* If Ainz could sweat, it would probably be pouring down his back like a waterfall. *My only option is to damage her consistently, before my mana runs out…* Otherwise, his defeat was certain.

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Shalltear fixed her grip on her Spuit Lance and glared at the magic caster in front of her. Her master, Ainz Ooal Gown. Although it was unclear to her why she had to fight her master, the being who deserved her worship, her brain dismissed it as a trivial problem. She could take her time thinking about it after killing him. Having thought as much, Shalltear stared at the lone undead while imagining the overwhelming advantage that she held in this battle. The thought twisted her lips into a smile.

A magic caster held incredible power, but that power depended entirely on his mana. If they were to run out, his combat potential would vanish as well. On the other hand, although Shalltear was a divine based magic caster, she was also proficient in close combat. Her enormous physical ability allowed her to fight as long as her health remained, even if her mana was depleted.

That's why, instead of chipping away at his health, victory in this battle will be all but certain if she can manage to completely drain her opponent's mana. Regardless, Ainz didn't have any effective healing spells at his disposal. *So tremble as you watch your health and mana slowly being chipped away. Ahaha. Just imagining Ainz-sama's terrified face is making my heart race!* Then what was the best method to fight? A battle of endurance.

Having decided her strategy for the upcoming battle, Shalltear gripped her Divine class item, Spuit Lance. This weapon had a special ability that returned a portion of the damage dealt to heal the wielder. No, it could be said that the weapon was specialized for that effect. That was why

Ainz, who normally fought from the back, did not call his summons to protect him at the front. He knew very well that sending out a weak monster would only serve to give the Spuit Lance more health.

Ahh, poor Ainz-sama. To think he can't use his summons and has to fight all alone! Shalltear held back a sadistic smile and used her skill, 'Analyze Mana'. Having temporarily gained the ability to detect mana, Ainz' remaining mana showed up in her vision. *Such an incredible amount… Just how did he get that much mana?* The amount of mana he possessed was vast, at least 1.5 times greater than Shalltear. Even if you searched all of Nazarick, you would not be able to find someone who could match him.

Truly fitting for a Supreme Being, Overspec Undead… Super Undead… No, Godlike Undead? Even so, she did not think for a minute that she would lose. Although it may be different if it were another Floor Guardian, against Shalltear, an opponent who specialized in death magic could not pose a threat to her. *'With that said, he still isn't an opponent I can get complacent against. Why isn't he wearing his Divine class items, I wonder?'*

The robe Ainz was wearing seemed somewhat shabby. It contained none of the dangerous aura that his usual raven colored robe exuded. *Some sort of a measure against me? The possibility is quite high. But the battle won't end at this rate if we just stare at each other. I'll prepare for the long haul and heal myself…*

"「Regeneration」." Using a spell that was effective even on undead, Shalltear slowly began to heal the damage from the super magic. Against this Shalltear, Ainz finally started his attack. He cast the super gravity magic he had used previously. "「Maximize Magic: Gravity Maelstrom」." As the black sphere flew towards her at high speed, the thought that she should put up a stone wall like before passed through her head. However, with that method, she couldn't pressure her opponent. She had to go on the offensive in order to force him to use up more of his mana. Shalltear's decision was—

"「Greater Teleportation」." Teleport to close the distance and aim for a melee battle. Her field of vision warped, the change in surroundings that was supposed to occur immediately, felt slower. *Che!* Shalltear realized it was the effect from the spell that inhibited spatial transference, 'Delay Teleportation'. The spot she was expecting to teleport to was where she would be able to reach Ainz with her Spuit Lance. However, she found that his figure was still a good distance away. Instead, in front of her eyes were three blinking photospheres, 'Drifting Master Mine'.

As the mines detected Shalltear and were about to detonate, she transformed into her Mist Form. This skill turned her body into mist and was well suited for a vampire. Despite describing it as such, she did not become a mist in the physical sense. It was more like the absence of a physical body, transforming into an Astral Body. This allowed her to completely avoid any attacks from the physical world like the imminent three explosions.

"Not good enough!" With a roar, Ainz cast 'Maximize Magic: Astral Smite'. Her resistances slightly lowered by her transformation, the magic that was effective against ethereal bodies enveloped Shalltear. With pain wracking her body, she released her Mist Form. Shalltear's lips tore into a smile as she felt a string of sleek fluid trail down her body. "Incredible! As expected of Ainz-sama!" Her sincere admiration did not receive a response, only a look of suspicion.

“You don’t believe me? But I honestly thought that you are indeed the person deserving of my loyalty.” As expected, a person skilled in magic combat. However, the smile did not leave Shalltear’s lips. His magic had depleted considerably. Of course, Shalltear’s health had also taken a hit. But her own loss was still within her calculations while Ainz’ mana loss exceeded it. Her profits had pulled plenty ahead. In other words, Shalltear was now that much closer to victory.

Now, how’s this? Shalltear made her next move. “「Force Sanctuary」.” A white light enveloped Shalltear’s surroundings. A barrier created from holy energy. Although she herself could not attack, it was an absolute barrier that completely blocked the opponent’s attack. On the other side of the light, the appearance of Ainz hastily preparing to launch his magic could be seen. “That’s right. It’ll get dangerous for you if you don’t cast your magic quickly.”

At first glance, the battle up to that point would have seemed to be progressing in Ainz’ favor. Shalltear already understood the reason. Ability? Wrong. Equipment? Wrong. Preparation? Correct. That’s right. This advantage was due to the many defensive spells Ainz had prepared beforehand. A magic caster’s strength varied greatly depending on how much he prepared before the battle. Of course, Shalltear was the same. That was why Ainz had immediately destroyed the defenses she had cast on her body. Like what she was doing now, he couldn’t afford to give Shalltear time to prepare her defenses.

In truth, Shalltear didn’t have the slightest intention of casting defensive magic. She wasn’t very good at them, after all. She merely wanted Ainz to waste more of his mana. That was why the scene of Ainz nervously preparing his spells made her laugh. *Arara, aren’t you playing too favorably in my hand, Ainz-sama? Anyway, why aren’t you using your scrolls, or your staff, or your wands? Are you trying to save them? Or maybe you’re panicking, or perhaps you know that they won’t work against me? Hmm~?*

Ainz’ magic resistance was capable of completely nullifying all low and intermediate tier magic, regardless of how strong of a magic caster his opponent was. On the other hand, Shalltear’s magic resistance depended on the strength or level of her opponent. A weak magic caster’s attack would be completely ineffective, even if it was a 10th tier spell. However, against an incredibly powerful magic caster — in this case, Ainz — 1st tier spells would be her limit.

Although the power of magic contained in items like scrolls varied to an extent based on the creator, they were normally adjusted to the lowest level. For this reason, there was a high chance that spells cast using a scroll would not be able to pierce through Shalltear’s magic resistance. It was the reason why Ainz was not using them.

As Shalltear calmly analyzed the situation, Ainz cast his magic. “「Maximize Magic: Thousand Bone Lance」.” Piercing through a wide area of earth with Ainz at its center, one thousand, two thousand. No, an uncountable number of bone spears exploded forth. The white spears scattered and crashed repeatedly into the magic barrier. And with the sound of breaking glass, Shalltear’s barrier began to shatter. The rubble that was scattering to the surroundings melted into thin air.

“Che!” The barrier she had created using a big chunk of her mana was destroyed in a single attack. This was completely outside of her predictions. While feeling annoyed from this development, another attack flew at her. “It isn’t over yet! 「Maximize Magic: Thousand Bone Lance」!”

"「Greater Teleportation」." She chose a location in the air, outside the effective range of 'Delay Teleportation'. "Did you think I will let you escape, 「Maximize Magic: Gravity Maelstrom」!" Somehow, Ainz was able to predict Shalltear's teleportation. As if he had grasped the timing of her reappearance, Ainz' magic flew in her direction. From his skillful battle, Shalltear almost felt like she was falling for him. The way he fought was impossible without a certain degree of experience.

"You still seem relaxed." Ainz, the one Shalltear had to kill for some reason, spoke quietly: "How is it that you seem so relaxed with me as your opponent? There is no difference in our levels, equipment wise I have the edge, and my only disadvantage is that I cannot use the spells I am specialized in. But Shalltear, I sense from you the conviction that you have the upper hand, the confidence that you can win, no matter the circumstances."

Towards her master, who was asking her why, Shalltear felt a sense of superiority. "Ahahaha. Then I'll show you just one of the reasons why I'm confident. Did you know I had a skill like this?" Shalltear wore a smile allowed only to the victor and activated her 'Unholy Shield'. A dark red shockwave that was reminiscent of blood spilled forth around her. It easily blew away the gravity sphere that was close to impact. It was one of Shalltear's skills that combined both offense and defence.

"Tsk!" The sound of Ainz clicking his tongue could be heard. If the reason that Shalltear clicked her tongue just previously was because of events that extended past her predictions, then his was because Ainz had just lost the advantage. "Ahaha!" Shalltear laughed at him and displayed another skill. Floating above her palm was a huge divine war spear that measured over three meters long. Its blade was particularly large. The pure aura radiating from the spear was proof that it was no ordinary weapon. Its silvery white brilliance that seemed to reflect the sun was beautiful.

"Ohhh… It is my first time seeing this. Did you create it with your skill?"

"Ahahaha. How long will you be able to keep up this farce, Ainz-sama? Since you don't even seem to know what this is, I'll explain it to you. The name of this spear is the Purifying Javelin!" Mocking his ignorance, Shalltear fired the silvery white spear. She did not throw it. Instead, it levitated by itself and shot through the air. By expending mana, it had the added effect of perfect accuracy—

"Ughhh!" It stabbed Ainz through the chest. To Shalltear, it looked as if the face that should not have been moving was twisted greatly in pain. "Ahahaha! It seems magic weapons with the holy attribute are different after all. This seems pretty effective?!" Once again, a huge spear materialized in Shalltear's hand and was immediately fired. The spear flew with an unavoidable speed and pierced through Ainz' shoulder.

"Kuh, you dare! 「Maximize Magic: Reality Slash」!" A powerful spell was cast. A minor version of 'World Break', the most powerful skill possessed by the strongest warrior class, World Champion. It was a skill that was only obtainable when one reached the maximum level of that class. Despite being a weakened version, its destructive power was top class even amongst the 10th tier spells. Blood sprouted as high as a fountain from Shalltear's shoulder as space itself was cut in its wake.

However, the attack that almost completely ignored her magic resistance, as if time was flowing backwards; the blood returned to her shoulder and the damage was negated. Witnessing such a scene, Ainz shouted. "What did you do!"

"Don't be so surprised, Ainz-sama. This is also a skill." Shalltear was dripping wet from superiority as she answered his question. "Tsk! You mean my skill is ineffective, yet you use yours freely?"

"Please don't think of it as unfair. This is a power granted to me by Peroroncino-sama. Isn't it proof that he was greater than you, Ainz-sama?"

"…It seems that those words are your true feelings." It was as if his expression had vanished.

His was a quiet voice devoid of emotion. Before Shalltear could begin to doubt, Ainz shouted once more. "Here I come, Shalltear! No matter what skills you possess, know that my magic is stronger!" 'Maximize Magic: Reality Slash' and 'Purifying Javelin' were exchanged, chipping away at each other's bodies. As the skill exchange occurred once more, Shalltear mocked in her head how foolish he was. At the same time, she was wondering why she was fighting him.

Shalltear Bloodfallen was the Floor Guardian in charge of the Great Tomb of Nazarick's first three floors, as well as a loyal subject created by Peroroncino, one of the 41 Supreme Beings of Ainz Ooal Gown. Then wasn't it strange that she was now fighting that same Ainz Ooal Gown, who had once used the name Momonga? Why was she pointing her blade against a member of the 41 Supreme Beings?

If her creator had ordered it, she would have fought with all the strength in her body. She would not hesitate even if all of Nazarick became her enemy. But this was different. No matter how much she wracked her brain, the answer did not come. However, she could not stop her hands from moving. A voice was whispering to her, telling her to kill with her full power.

Shalltear spied with 'Analyze Magic' as Ainz used up his mana. While suppressing her mounting laughter, she used her time reversal to restore her health. Powerful magic comes at a heavy cost. Among them, 'Reality Slash', considering its damage-to-cost ratio, was terribly inefficient. The fact that he used it in succession meant that he determined the crux of the battle to depend on how much he could wear down Shalltear before the battle came to a melee.

That's right. Aiming for a short battle was the correct idea, since I would hold the advantage in a drawn out fight… though I don't know how effective debuffs would be against undead. Shalltear narrowed her eyes as she stared at the person casting powerful spells one after another. *Alright. Shall I follow your lead?*

Shalltear's skills were divided into those that could be used infinitely and ones that had a set number of uses. Her method of recovering through time reversal could only be used three times a day, same for the Purifying Javelin. The Unholy Shield had only one charge left. But saving them held no charm. From the start, Shalltear believed that the final showdown would come to a melee. Her mana and skills were only tools for her to chip away at Ainz' mana.

Although I can still fight without my mana, if yours is gone then it's fatal, Ainz-sama. Shalltear who fought with both her health and mana, against Ainz who was forced to fight with just his mana.

From the beginning, there was an overwhelming difference between the two sides. Shalltear's gentle eyes were fixed on Ainz, who could not choose anything other than magic. Rather than a mother worrying over her child, it was more accurate to describe it as a look of compassion from the strong to the weak.

With her last Purifying Javelin fired and receiving 'Reality Slash' in response, Shalltear moved to the second stage of the battle. "Then how about this? 「10th Tier Summon Monster」."

"As if I'll let you! 「Greater Rejection」!" The summoned monster vanished in an instant. Ainz spoke in a voice tinged with pride. "I won't let you stall for time, Shalltear."

Don't laugh, Shalltear. He's just using his mana right after my skill! Struggling to keep a straight face, Shalltear cast her magic. "Is that so? Then shall I face you directly? 「Maximize Magic: Vermillion Nova」."

"「Triple Maximize Magic: Call Greater Thunder」." Dark red flames that were Ainz' weakness wrapped around his body. At the same time, three enormous thunderbolts, fused from multiple strands of lightning, pierced through Shalltear. Along with the feeling of her health being carved away, for the first time in this battle, an unpleasant expression floated to Shalltear's face.

He raised his fire resistance? No matter how strong a person was, it was impossible to be fully resistant to every type of attribute. Even if you were to stack resistances from your race, class, and even Divine class equipment, there was still a limit. However, if one were to completely erase a resistance to an attribute, it was possible to raise another to be fully immune.

This was the case even if it was an attribute that you were weak against. In other words, Ainz had abandoned a different attribute in order to focus on improving his fire resistance. *How annoying, I don't know which attribute he gave up.* The only way to find out would be to use 'Analyze Life' to bring up his health and cast spells from every attribute to see how it reacts. *As if I'd do something as bothersome as that. Then with an attribute he's definitely weak to—*

"「Maximize Magic: Brilliant Radiance」."

"「Maximize Magic: True Darkness」."

While Ainz was purified by a holy light that engulfed his body, Shalltear's body was assaulted by a dark void. In that instant, Shalltear did not miss it; the momentary image of his body shaking. Even now, he had quickly fixed his posture and was pretending to not notice. But no one would fall for such an obvious act. It was the struggle of a body trying to endure the pain.

Shalltear laughed without letting it show on her face, she had found his weakness. No, it couldn't be helped. The undead were critically weak to the holy attribute. It was incredibly difficult to erase this weakness. Even more so if his equipment was used to raise his fire resistance, then it was absolutely impossible. As the two stared each other down, they cast the next magic. Of course, Shalltear chose the same, 'Brilliant Radiance'.

Just how many times did their spells go back and forth? Even for Shalltear, she had lost a significant amount of her health. If she hadn't secretly used her skill that weakens magical effects in exchange for continually draining her mana, then her health may have even dropped downed

to zero. *As I thought, he's incredible… Both in attack and defence, Ainz-sama is overwhelmingly more powerful than me in a battle of magic. Even with me using holy magic in succession, he probably didn't take as much damage as I did. But still… He's used up quite a bit of mana.*

Ainz' mana that showed up in her vision was now much lower than when they first started. Despite this, his eyes still burned violently with a fiery spirit. *Ahh, my body is tingling. Such a wonderful man, I want to see what he looks like when he's defeated and his spirit broken.* Shalltear quelled the feeling surging from her lower abdomen. If she were in her room, she might have called a vampire bride. Unfortunately, there were none here. Needless to say, she could hardly pleasure herself and vent her sexual urges here and now.

Then the only option left, satisfy herself in battle. Her eyes wet with lust, Shalltear stared at Ainz while licking her lips with her tongue. What sort of reaction will he show if she were to further increase her advantage right here? "Then I'll be healing myself now. 「Maximize Magic: Greater Lethal」."

The living are healed by positive energy and damaged by negative energy. Undead are the opposite. That's why a spell like 'Greater Lethal', that channels powerful negative energy inwards, becomes the greatest healing magic for undead like Shalltear. "You're right. I have lost a considerable amount of health as well. 「Greater Lethal」." Shalltear blinked her eyes several times. She couldn't believe what was happening. However, seeing how his wounds were being healed before her very eyes, she had no choice but to accept it.

"…Huh? How can Ainz-sama cast divine magic like 'Greater Lethal'? Was it on the learnable skills list for your class?"

"No, unfortunately this power is not my own, but from a magic item. It is an item that lets me use just one specific spell. For that, I have to use up one of my equipment slots. It also cannot be used with the Maximize Magic skill and the effect is not as powerful as the one from the original class. There is not a lot that's good about it."

Seeing Ainz use 'Greater Lethal' a second time while complaining about what a bother it is, Shalltear muttered that the schedule had changed slightly. With that said, it didn't make too big of a difference since one of her objectives of making Ainz spend his mana was successful. Having made her judgment, Shalltear activated 'Greater Lethal' once more and treated her wounds. Since she was level 100, it took some time before she made a complete recovery. And the last—

"「Maximize Magic: Greater Lethal」."

"「Body of Effulgent Beryl」." …While she healed her injuries, Ainz was casting a defensive spell on himself. Shalltear, in addition to being a divine magic caster, did not receive a great amount of information from Peroroncino. Thus, she did not know what type of effect the 'Body of Effulgent Beryl' spell produced. Seeing Ainz wrapped by the green sheen that he had worn just moments ago, Shalltear determined that he had used a defence magic.

That's the correct decision. I was just about to start attacking you personally. Just as Shalltear was getting ready to wield the Spuit Lance to her heart's content, she heard a complaint that sounded as if it was spilled unintentionally. "To think I would be at such a disadvantage." Completely blindsided, Shalltear loosened the hand that was around her Spuit Lance and thought to herself.

You just figured it out? With that said, she reasoned that saying such a thing to her master, Ainz-sama, would be insolent and did not let it out of her mouth. *…Master? Ainz-sama?* Shalltear wondered at the word that had surfaced in her mind several times already throughout the fight. She wanted to know why she had to point her blade at her master, Ainz-sama. But it was like that. There were plenty of things in the world that she didn't understand. This was just one of them.

Even when she determined it to be such, Shalltear thought her actions against Ainz were not consistent with that line of thinking. That's why, with a calm voice that couldn't have come from the middle of a battle, she spoke to him. "If the battle is unfavorable, maybe you should run?"

"But, about that…" Something similar to a bitter smile seemed to flash across Ainz' face; on the skeleton face that should not have been able to move.

"I am… Yes. I am very selfish, Shalltear. I do not wish to run away." Ainz stared at his empty, skeletal hand. As if she was drawn to it, Shalltear's vision also moved to that spot. "Though I doubt anyone will understand, even if others think of me as a fool, in this moment, as a Guildmaster, I feel satisfied. How should I put it… I… Even though I held the position of Guildmaster, in truth, all I did was regulate and handle menial tasks. Ultimately, I did not lead from the front. However, right now, I am fighting for the sake of the guild at the forefront… Though it may just be for my self-satisfaction."

"Is that so? Perhaps that's what they call a man's pride?"

"That… is that what this is? Perhaps… it may just be out of desperation. It seems I've ruined the mood with such a boring story. Forgive me. Shall we continue?"

Part 2

Ainz calmly stared at the figure of Shalltear holding her Spuit Lance. In order for him to seize victory, he had to get through this melee. The equipment around Shalltear's back swelled, and as if bursting through the armor, sprouted the wings of a bat. Ainz knew what would come next. Countless large bats flew into the air from her back. They were Elder Vampire Bats created from the 'Raise Kin' skill. They were also accompanied by Vampire Bat Swarms. Although they weren't that strong, they still couldn't be ignored.

Ainz immediately cast his magic. "「Shark Cyclone」." In an instant, a tornado that was 100 meters high and measured 50 meters in diameter made its appearance. It tore through the land and lifted the earth into the air. Darkened by the debris, the tornado swallowed the fleeing bats into its body. Within the raging cyclone, numerous shadows could be seen slowly moving about.

The shadows that were swimming around as if inside an ocean, sharks measuring around six meters. They flocked in groups to the swarms of bats desperately trying to fly against the tornado, like bait thrown to the surface. While the spell effective against airborne creatures displayed its strength, much like how the sharks were tearing through the Elder Vampire Bats, there was another who was tearing through the storm.

The crimson figure pierced through the tornado head on and charged at high speed. With the tip of her lance pointing forward, the figure left behind a trail of heat like a jet. Unable to react in time, Ainz felt a sharp pain all over his body. *Crack,* he felt every bone in his body fracture. The instant

he had lowered his guard, Shalltear moved right up to his eyes and had pierced through his sternum with her murderous weapon. The tip of the lance crushed his bones and shot out of his back.

"Ugh!" He cried out in pain. Shalltear had used her skill to give the lance a striking property and delivered a blow to his health. The undead Ainz was strong against pain. Like his mind, damage that exceeds a fixed threshold was suppressed. That was why even a complete novice of fighting like Suzuki Satoru could keep his composure without losing himself to the pain. But this was intense. The feeling of his life being carved away. A feeling similar to your vision darkening from losing most of your blood, it violently rattled Ainz's… No, Suzuki Satoru's weak mind.

But Ainz' will surpassed it. The man fighting here was not Suzuki Satoru. It was the Supreme Ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown. Even as Ainz was searching for his next course of attack, Shalltear's assault did not stop. With the end of her lance still penetrating through Ainz, she pushed forward again and again.

As the blade stabbed deeper, the thicker part of the lance continued to dig into his body. The feeling of his body splitting in half and the pounding pain, along with his rapidly deteriorating health. It triggered the activation of his 'Body of Effulgent Beryl'. The green sheen that hugged his body shattered. The 10th tier magic, 'Body of Effulgent Beryl'.

For its duration, it had the passive effect of reducing damage from strike attacks. When activated, it had a one-time use of completely nullifying strike damage. The damage dealt by the lance was absorbed by the 'Body of Effulgent Beryl'. As if time was reversed, the lance was pushed out of Ainz' body.

Pushed away by the lance to his location, Ainz launched his spell at Shalltear who didn't seem to understand what had just happened. "「Wall of Skeletons」!" A wall of bone made of countless skeletons wielding weapons appeared between the two figures. The skeletons that formed the wall swung and stabbed at Shalltear. However, not a single one reached Shalltear's body.

"「Maximize Magic: Force Explosion」." An invisible shockwave burst out with Shalltear at its center and crashed into the wall of bone. The wall bent, and unable to withstand the force of the shockwave, exploded. The scattered bones showered down with the sound of rain. But it had proved useful in buying Ainz time.

"Release!" Following his command, 'Greater Magic Seal' released three magic circles, each firing 30 shots of white arrows of light, for a combined volley of 90 shots. What was released was normal attack magic, 'Magic Arrow'. The beautiful afterglow from the flying arrows resembled the wings of an angel. However, this was an angel that signaled death.

Magic of the 1st tier cannot penetrate Shalltear's magic resistance. Sensing the danger behind the fact that Ainz used it regardless, Shalltear hastily tried to dodge to her side. However, the white arrows made a sharp turn and perfectly lodged themselves into the target, like a shower of rain. The damage from 90 consecutive white magic instantly destroyed Shalltear's health. The secret behind how they managed to pierce through her magic resistance was because he had used a skill that temporarily brought up their power to rival that of 10th tier magic.

His assault did not stop there. “Dance! 「Triple Maximize Magic: Obsidian Sword」!” Three swords that gave off a black light floated in mid-air. As if they had a will of their own, they immediately flew straight towards Shalltear. Shalltear repelled them with her Spuit Lance, as if telling them to stay out of her way. However, ‘Obsidian Sword’ continued its assault. It was incredibly difficult to destroy a sword made of magic with a physical attack.

“「Magic Destruction」.” Shalltear used what little mana she had left to cast a magic cancelling spell. With her mana now completely gone, her magic destroyed two of the swords in mid-air. But with one left, the remaining sword continued to attack Shalltear. ‘Magic Destruction’s success rate varied depending on the ability of the user. The result simply showed which of the two, was the stronger magic caster.

“Ahh, annoying!” Shalltear ignored the blade heading in her direction and charged at Ainz. Magic of that level wouldn’t be able to damage her. The blow from the Spuit Lance threw Ainz to the side. Ainz was weak to strike attacks. Unable to ignore the damage, he steadied himself in the air using his ‘Flight’ magic. And—

“Damn it!” For the first time in this battle, he lost his calm and cursed. It wasn’t that his health had dropped enough to warrant such a reaction. The problem was the phenomenon that was occurring before his eyes. The health that he lost was absorbed by Shalltear and had healed her. The speed of that restoration surpassed the damage from the ‘Obsidian Sword’. In order to deal damage greater than her healing, Ainz immediately covered her with attack magic.

“「Triple Maximize Magic: Reality Slash」.” One after another, three attacks that slashed space itself drew blood from Shalltear’s body. However, she ignored it and approached him to shorten the distance, bringing the ‘Obsidian Sword’ on her back with her. *Without her mana, Shalltear has no choice but to close in and fight inside the range of her Spuit Lance… But that is not in my favor.*

While retreating with ‘Flight’, Ainz continued his barrage of attacks. “「Triple Maximize Magic: Reality Slash」.” Despite the fact that he was on the run, with every blink, the distance between them was shrinking. It was the difference between the flying speed strengthened by a skill and that of ‘Flight’ magic. With blood spilling from her body, Shalltear closed the distance until she was right in front of his eyes. Crouching forward, Shalltear released a shockwave with herself at its center. *It’s not ‘Force Explosion’! ‘Unholy Shield’?!*

The shockwave formed from her skill shattered the remaining ‘Obsidian Sword’ and crashed into Ainz, blowing him back a great distance. “Kuh! Gaah!” There was no doubt that she had combined her Unholy Shield with another unknown skill. Ainz crashed into the ground and rolled twice, three times, and forcefully recovered his balance with the help of a magic item and his ‘Flight’ magic. Whether it was because he lacked a vestibular system or because it was a characteristic of being an undead, Ainz, who didn’t even feel dizzy, glared at Shalltear over the widened distance.

This was a stroke of good fortune. Ainz did not desire a close range fight. The fact that their distance increased meant that he had more time to use his magic. As he was about to cast his spell, Ainz spotted a gathering of bright light that appeared in front of Shalltear. As if to block the two, the light occupied the space between them and formed into a shape the size of a human.

He knew very well what that was. Ainz twisted his unmoving face into a frown, while Shalltear wore a victorious smile. “So it’s here… At last. I thought it would appear eventually, but to use it here… ‘Einherjar’, Shalltear’s greatest secret weapon.” The white light took the shape of a complete human. Its appearance was that of a figure wearing white armor. If you were to exclude the fact that its skin radiated a pale light, it would look almost identical to Shalltear, its summoner.

Ainz knew that the appearance wasn’t the only similarity the two shared. It doesn’t have the ability to use magic or items, along with some of its skills. However, its equipment and stats are on par with Shalltear herself. Although the race was a construct similar to a golem, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that its resistances were nearly identical to those of an undead.

It could be considered as a second Shalltear that could only use regular attacks. Although he had expected this to happen, the burden of fighting two level 100 enemies at once was huge. On top of this, Shalltear raised a great number of her kin. Wolves, bats, rat swarms and many more. Although none were at the level of the Einherjar, the strength in numbers was not to be underestimated.

Assuming I take them out instantly with area of effect magic… What should I do about the Einherjar? While Ainz was exploring his options, the Einherjar charged in his direction. It was a situation that even he hadn’t predicted. *Why isn’t Shalltear making a move? Isn’t her plan to decide the fight with numbers?* The question was answered as soon as he shifted his eyes. At the same time, the flame inside his empty eye sockets flared greatly.

“Uwah! So unfair!!” He accidently spoke as Suzuki Satoru, asking if something like that was allowed. The scene that was reflected in Ainz’ vision; the summoned kin were being destroyed, pierced by the Spuit Lance. Shalltear was attacking the creatures she herself summoned with her Spuit Lance and healing off of them.

The healing ability of the Spuit Lance, needless to say, depended on the amount of damage inflicted. Ainz, who was the same level with high defence, versus her weak kin. There was no need to state which side would give more health. Reflected in Ainz’ vision in real time was the image of Shalltear restoring great amounts of her health.

The summoned creatures soon vanished, pierced by the lance. It was a truly cruel and unthinkable situation. But since friendly fire exist in this world, it could be called an obvious strategy. Ainz regained his composure and began to hatch a plan for this unexpected situation.

But to witness a scene where one killed their own summoned creature to restore health, it was something that could never have been possible in Yggdrasil. As if he couldn’t completely suppress his agitation, Ainz took the full brunt of the attack from the Einherjar that managed to close the distance right up to his face.

“Kuughh!” Ainz was blown away with a scream; the Einherjar continued her attack with an expressionless face. As Ainz continued to retreat while under attack, he decided that he too, will lift the seal on his secret weapon. Shalltear’s ability to summon kin wasn’t unlimited, so it would eventually end. But letting her heal from all of the creatures around her was too dangerous.

Originally, he was going to use it when the Einherjar made its appearance. Aside from her healing herself by killing her own summons, the plan was still proceeding accordingly. Amongst his 60 or

so class levels, there was one particular class. Even in Yggdrasil, it was a highly rare class that only a few possessed.

The reason Ainz was able to get such a class was because he ignored power and maxed his death magic for the sake of role playing. A person who only wanted to make a strong character would not have been able to find it. It was a coincidence because builds skewed to the extreme were rare.

The prerequisite was to have five levels in Overlord. The next step was to be specialized almost completely in death magic while having a total level of 95. Only then, could you obtain the class. A rare class like this, if it were a different game, the information would have been immediately uploaded to a guide site and shared. But Yggdrasil was a game where information itself had value. Like the case with World class items, the number of people who freely shared newly discovered information with others was small. This was especially the case with classes that had a secret weapon.

That class was 'Eclipse'. 「The Overlord that has mastered death in the truest sense will rise to this class. Like an eclipse, he will encroach upon all life.」 was what was written in the class status description. And what he was about to use now, the skill learned at level five, which was the highest possible level of the Eclipse class. It was a skill that could only be used once every 100 hours.

The name of the skill was 'The Goal of All Life is Death'. In an instant, a clock with its hands marking the twelve o'clock position appeared behind Ainz' back. He then cast a spell. "「Widen Magic: Cry of the Banshee」." A woman's scream rang throughout the surroundings like a ripple. It was a shout with an instant death effect. It was reinforced by Ainz' many skills, making it stronger than normal and difficult to resist. But needless to say, it did not affect an undead like Shalltear and neither the Einherjar, who was considered a Construct and therefore had complete immunity to instant death effects.

But strangely enough, not even the creatures in the area that did not have complete resistance were affected. Despite the strange situation, Ainz did not budge. Actually, events were proceeding as they should. With a clanking noise, as if matching the timing with when the spell was cast, the clock behind Ainz began to tick. As his health was being chipped away by the repeated attacks from the Einherjar's lance, Ainz observed Shalltear from the corner of his vision and at the same time, was disappointed.

…As I thought, the battle won't be settled. That Peroroncino, did he set up this countermeasure just for me? You didn't have to give her a resurrection item, damn it! He felt anger in his heart towards his friend whom he had been close with, even within the guild. While Ainz was busy dodging the Einherjar's attacks, twelve seconds passed. Having completed a full revolution, once again, the hand on the clock pointed towards the sky. And Ainz' secret weapon activated. That moment—

The world died. It was not a figure of speech. Everything had died. In front of his eyes, the Einherjar turned into a white mist and began to crumble. Even the lifeless construct had died instantly. Likewise, Shalltear's kin, succumbing to a power that they could not resist, began to die out. But it did not end there. Even the air that was devoid of life died and turned the 200 meter diameter into a space where breathing was impossible. If there had been a being here who needed to breathe in order to live, the dead air would have contaminated the lungs and ended its life.

Not only that, the land died as well. With Ainz at its center, an area measuring 200 meters in diameter instantly turned into a desert. In a world where only death existed, the only thing left moving was Ainz and Shalltear. Ainz's secret weapon, 'The Goal of All Life is Death', it strengthened the instant death effect of spells and skills to the point where even those with complete immunity were killed.

A method to defend against it was to, like Shalltear, deploy a self-resurrection effect and so on. It was also the reason why even inanimate objects like the air and land had died. Although its effects weren't to this extent in Yggdrasil, in the real world, it was much more clearly pronounced in the form of granting 'Death' to all equally.

Even Ainz was taken aback by this strange occurrence. The fact that using a game skill in reality could change it to this degree, it was almost enough to make him unwittingly shake his head in wonder. But Ainz swallowed his surprise. His pride was what kept him from letting his shock seem obvious. As if to say that this was what he was aiming for, Ainz, with a haughty arrogance befitting a ruler, quietly spoke to the lone survivor.

"How do you feel after witnessing the power that grants death to even those without life?" A fresh breeze flowed into the surroundings, thinning the dead air. Carried by that wind, another voice could be heard. "It was amazing, as expected of Ainz-sama. All of my kin ended up getting killed. But Ainz-sama's mana seems to be almost gone. On the other hand… My health is still fine."

Shalltear's eyes reflected the nearly depleted state of Ainz' mana. Although he still had a bit left, it was only enough to cast probably two or three more spells at max. With so few, no matter what spells he used, it would be impossible to kill Shalltear. This was the case even if he were to use the Super-tier magic 'Fallen Down'.

"Is using two more 10th tier spells your limit? But since Ainz-sama's magic is so strong, there's no telling what amazing things you could do even with just that."

"Indeed, it seems about two is all I have left." It was not a lie. She won. A smile of satisfaction rose to Shalltear's mouth. The line that divided the victor and the defeated was now clearly decided. Shalltear Bloodfallen as the victor, Ainz Ooal Gown as the defeated. With the composure of the winner, Shalltear praised the loser, Ainz, who had put up a good fight.

"You were incredible Ainz-sama. Like how your mana is almost gone, mine is completely spent and my skill charges are nearly gone as well. You've fought very well until now." She channeled her strength into her hand grasping the Spuit Lance. The only thing left was to end his life in close combat. "I agree. Your compliments, I will accept them graciously."

Twitch. Shalltear's cheek moved. She didn't like it. Ainz Ooal Gown's calm behavior. But Shalltear cut down the encroaching snake named anxiety with a single slash. No matter how hard she thought it over, there was no way for Ainz to overturn this situation. He had already spent his single use secret weapon. Then that could only be the appearance of the condemned who has accepted his final moments. Rather than calling it composure, it was more like a feeling of resignation born from his resolve.

Shalltear slowly walked and began to close the distance. Even if he were to attack with a scroll, she was confident that her attack would be faster. That was why there was no need for her to be

impatient. Ainz did not flee. Not only that, he simply stood his ground without moving. Sensing his resolve, Shalltear asked: "Do you have any last words?" "Let's see… Because I was at a disadvantage, because I would turn into a weakling once my mana ran out… And because you thought as much, for not saving your power, I am very grateful, Shalltear. If you had fought with discretion, the battle would not have gone nearly as well. "

"…What?" Shalltear doubted her ears. Just now, she had heard something incredibly out of place. Having left Shalltear in such a state, Ainz spoke quietly. "The most important aspect of PVP is how well you transmit fake information to your opponent. For example, switching your equipment in order to raise your holy resistance while acting as if it was still effective. While on the other hand, leaving your weakness, the fire attribute, untouched. Only… my predictions were slightly off. I expected you to use 'Analyze Life' and had prepared 'False Data: Life' in advance, but it ended up being a useless effort. If you ever get another chance, make sure that you clearly observe your opponent's health. Otherwise, there will be a large disparity between devising the plan and its execution."

They were not the words she was expecting. Shalltear couldn't understand what was being said. No, she didn't want to understand. He simply has yet to accept his defeat. No, that wasn't it. She felt a strong will. Not only that a presence of someone with victory in his grasp. Her steps as she approached Ainz felt heavy, weighed down by something rising in her heart. *…Why isn't Ainz-sama widening the distance? A magic caster like him won't be able to beat me at this range, it's a bluff!*

"My friend Peroroncino has told me quite a bit about you, back when he was still working on your design. Ever since first arriving in this world, I have memorized the data of all of my servants. Still, if we were to exclude Pandora's Actor, whom I created personally, among all the NPCs of Nazarick, you may be the one I understand the most."

"A moment ago, you said that you didn't… Know about my skills…"

Ainz laughed in response. "Is it not obvious that it was a lie? I thought it would make you more confident. But if you had saved your Unholy Shield, then I would not have been able predict the outcome of this battle." Although blood coursed through her veins, as an undead, it was useless to her. Shalltear felt that same blood drain from her body, coupled with her swelling anxiety. It wasn't a bluff. His words just now did not carry a single trace of falsehood. Standing before her, the reason that Ainz Ooal Gown did not retreat was because he was sure of his victory.

"Ahhhhh—!" Shalltear opened her mouth wide and screamed. She was venting the emotions surging within her as noise. Shalltear was supposed to be the lion while Ainz was the rabbit. He should have been her prey… No, that was never the case. From the beginning, this was a battle between lions. Shalltear had just thought on her own that he was a rabbit—

Filled with apprehension, Shalltear resolved herself that even if he resisted the first attack, she would not stop her assault until he was dead. With the intent of ending everything, here in this moment, Shalltear thrust her Spuit Lance—

A step faster, Ainz cast his spell. At the same time, moved his hand as if he was trying to tear off his robe. The sound of impact rang out. Shalltear doubted her eyes. It just wasn't possible. The Spuit Lance had been deflected by a bright white mass. If it had been a spell, Shalltear would have immediately prepared herself to receive an attack. All the while thinking how it was only a useless

struggle because of the low amount of mana that Ainz had remaining. However, Shalltear, unable to comprehend what had just occurred before her very eyes, felt her mind go numb for an instant. The bright white mass was not magic.

It was armor. A white armor. The huge sapphire embedded in its chest radiated a pure and divine light. The armor had protected Ainz' body and repelled the attack from the Spuit Lance. Due to their difference in height, Ainz, whose field of vision was higher, was looking down at Shalltear. No… He may actually have been looking down on her in earnest. Although the situation was enough to make her furious, the current Shalltear could not afford such a luxury. It was because she had heard a chilling voice. "From the beginning, I too wished to end this battle in a melee."

♦ ♦ ♦

Crash. Someone slammed down on the table. The impact caused the grand table to shake violently. The battle up to this point was being observed from this room. Although the sound of the table being slammed had rung out several times already, this was the first time he had touched it.

"Impossible! That is… that person's armor!"

"…Touch Me–sama?" Without taking her eyes off of the crystal screen, Albedo muttered the name of one of the 41 Supreme Beings. "That's right! That is Touch Me–sama's armor!" As if he was agitated — no, it is likely that he was agitated in earnest — a shout escaped from Cocytus' mouth.

The armor that Ainz was wearing belonged to a certain person who had managed to obtain the World Champion class, of which there were only nine in Yggdrasil. The World Champion was a special class granted only to the victor of the official martial tournament. As for the prize, the champion was given one piece of special equipment from the administrator.

Touch Me had chosen that white armor as his prize. The power of the armor suited for a World Champion surpassed that of Divine class items, rivalling even Guild weapons. Of course, since it was a reward for the winner of the tournament, only the World Champion could equip it.

"Warrior transformation magic… 'Perfect Warrior'… Definitely, if you were to use that… You would be able to ignore the class restrictions on equipment." Demiurge spoke in a voice filled with awe while Albedo muttered under her breath. "He's thought this far ahead…" Albedo hugged her body with both arms and trembled.

Turning into a warrior through magic allowed one to wear equipment even if was restricted to a special class. It was a measure by the administration to give a way for players to enjoy the more obscure equipment like the shuriken, vajra, or the monk robe. However, this measure of ignoring class restrictions ended up also including the equipment given to the World Champion for winning the official tournament.

"I can't believe it… to think this was all part of his plan… I can only give my admiration." The winner of the battle still hadn't been decided. But seeing Ainz, with his resourcefulness, and the smooth way he carried out his plan that showed his experience in battle, the gathered Floor Guardians couldn't help but express their awe.

As the Floor Guardians looked upon their master with a gaze of both delight and admiration, they heard the sound of the table being slammed a second time. “That is!” Once again, it was Cocytus who shouted.

Part 3

A slashing noise. “Kyaaaaaaa!” Absent-minded from witnessing an impossible scene, Shalltear screamed. The blade entered through her shoulder, cleaved her sternum and stopped at her unmoving heart. With faltering steps, she retreated. Her crimson armor now dyed in a deeper shade of red, Shalltear glared with shock.

Ainz held a sword in his hand. A sharp and huge katana wrapped in lightning. It had cut through her armor like paper. Even amongst Divine class items, there were few that could so easily cut through Shalltear’s Legendary class armor. Then… The answer could only be that ‘few’. Indeed. The weapon that Ainz held in his hand was one of them—

Along with her blood, Shalltear coughed out the name of the weapon. “Takemikazuchi Mk 8!” Once again, the blade hurtled towards her, causing Shalltear to retreat a great distance in order to avoid it. Her large distance outside of the weapon’s range showed how much she feared it. No one could fault her, especially if one was a Floor Guardian of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

Because a weapon wielded by ‘Warrior Takemikazuchi’ — one of the 41 Supreme Beings — had made its appearance. “As I have already said, Shalltear. There is no defeat for ‘Ainz Ooal Gown’.” Ainz advanced forward one step, and Shalltear retreated two. “Realize now, Shalltear. You face Ainz Ooal Gown, with the combined might of all 41 Supreme Beings. From the beginning, you had no chance of victory.” Then—

The tide of battle was no longer the same as before. A low voice rang out, one belonging to a man who has blown away his overwhelming disadvantage. “Shalltear Bloodfallen. Engrave into your eyes the power of the one whom you all call and revere as the Supreme Ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, leader of the Supreme Beings.” It was a signal that he was now going to switch to the offensive. Ainz stepped forward, raising his two hands high above his head and brandished his katana. Ainz spoke quietly. With absolute conviction and an unbroken confidence.

Like walking on thin ice, it was a battle where even the smallest mistake would have sent him plummeting down a bottomless lake. The current Ainz was now closing in on the heart of his enemy. Both of their mana was at zero. In health, Shalltear held the advantage. However, Ainz, who was now a level 100 Warrior thanks to ‘Perfect Warrior’, surpassed Shalltear who was not of a pure warrior class. Even in equipment, Ainz held the advantage.

Shalltear took a step back and readied herself to charge in at the same time. She was planning to attack during the opening after the blade was brought down. In reality, Takemikazuchi Mk.8 was considered a large weapon and, like the Spuit Lance, incapable of nimble movements.

Wrapped in lightning, Takemikazuchi Mk.8 cleaved through the air, and stopped right at the edge of Shalltear’s chest, who was in a stance ready to charge forward. What followed was a god-speed thrust. No matter how physically strong you are, it is difficult to stop a swing brought down in full force in mid-air.

Even more so if the weapon is of a considerable size. The reason such a thing was possible was because Ainz did not swing with his full strength. In other words, it was an attack with the assumption that it will not hit, purposefully creating a weak spot. Planning your attack while thinking several moves ahead, it was an obvious tactic for a warrior. All Ainz did was to put it into practice.

However, he would never have thought of it if not for the battle experience he got in E-Rantel. He would simply have swung aimlessly and be met with Shalltear's counterattack. There was no doubt that he, despite becoming a level 100 warrior, would have ended up in a situation where he was unable to bring out his full strength and wasted away the treasure.

It was similar to driving a car. Even if one had a license and knew how to drive, the difference between a beginner and an experienced driver becomes incredibly apparent when faced with a difficult situation. This… was experience. What Ainz believed to be his greatest 'weapon' in his battle against Shalltear.

Dodging it will be difficult. Shalltear calmly judged it as such while staring at the incredibly fast thrust heading her way. However, a thrust was a risky technique. Exploiting its weakness will give her a great opportunity. *Then… I have no choice.* With the determination to sacrifice an arm, Shalltear squeezed her left hand into the trajectory path of the thrust. The instant the katana stabbed her; Shalltear slightly moved her left hand and averted the force of the thrust to veer off to her side.

Piercing through her left palm rather than her chest, the katana lost none of its momentum and cleaved through both the flesh and bone, tearing through the inside of her left arm. The lightning riding through the blade pierced Shalltear's body from the inside. Even for an undead, the feeling of having one's flesh torn apart gave her goose bumps. However, a corner of Shalltear's lips twisted upwards. That was a smile, it was not an expression that should have been on someone who had just received such damage. But it was not a bluff either. This was what Shalltear had been aiming for.

Shalltear flexed her left arm with the katana lodged inside. Her muscles grabbed on to the blade and stopped its movements. It was common that a thrust would often miss its mark or become stuck because of the muscles. That was why it was considered difficult to use, in other words, it had a weakness. Because Shalltear knew this, she gave up her left arm to create such an opening. It was an incredible technique where the window of timing between the blade entering the arm and cutting through the flesh was less than a second.

"An opening!" With his sword restrained, Ainz had no way to avoid the Spuit Lance. Shalltear, who was about to swing her Spuit Lance with the speed of light, saw a surprising scene. Ainz threw away the Divine class katana, one of the strongest in its class, and drew one of the many wooden rods that he wore around his belt.

"Hah! How foolish! You're going to try blocking my Spuit Lance with something like that?! And you even threw away your weapon, you've made the wrong choice!" Not clinging to the Divine class item Takemikazuchi Mk.8 was wise, but there was no way to win without it. With a jeer, Shalltear, determined to inflict as much damage as she received in her left arm, thrust her Spuit Lance with all her strength and… Was repelled with a metallic sound.

“Eh?” Shalltear let out a stunned noise. The wooden rod in Ainz’ hand was no longer there. In its place were two kodachi. The weapons held a brilliant radiance like the sun, a serene light like the moon. Smoke rose from Ainz’ hands that were holding the weapons, as if they resented being touched by an undead.

“Where is this opening, Shalltear?”

“Ehhh?! What? H, How?” The weight of the weapon that was supposed to be in Shalltear’s left arm was no longer present. As soon as Ainz pulled a new weapon, it disappeared, as if it couldn’t exist in the same world. Shalltear vaguely understood: It had returned to where it originally belonged.

“Not knowing how to feint, even if I held a sword in each hand, it would be better for me to just use one… Was it?” As if recalling a memory, Ainz’ muttering seemed to be directed at a person who was not present. “Maybe, but what about the present me? Without even a chance to ponder the meaning of those words, the kodachi seeped in moonlight flashed towards Shalltear.

Despite looking as if it was heading for her neck, the trajectory skillfully changed course and headed for her shoulder. Such an attack was just barely deflected by the Spuit Lance. Aiming for this, Ainz deeply stepped into the gap in Shalltear’s opening. The larger the weapon, the weaker they become in close quarters. Understanding this thoroughly, those were the movements of a veteran. The sun kodachi in his other hand penetrated the Spuit Lance’s defenses and lightly dug into Shalltear’s body.

“AAAAAHHHHHHH!” A voice filled with pain exploded from the space between her lips. The pain from the actual sword was nothing. However, pain from the holy attribute of the blade seeped into her body like a toxin. This she could not endure. With the blade still lodged, Ainz moved the sword to the side to try and widen the wound.

“Get away!” Because it was not a distance where she could freely swing the Spuit Lance, Shalltear threw a kick. Although Ainz blocked it with his kodachi, he could not completely absorb the force of the impact and was blown backwards. Then Shalltear saw it; the figure of Ainz letting go of the kodachi and grabbing a small wooden rod. And the moment the rod shattered, it covered his hand and revealed a dreadful, huge gauntlet. Large enough to touch the ground even while standing, the gauntlet—

“Haah!”, cleaved through the air as Ainz stepped forward and charged with a yell. Although she unwittingly blocked it with her lance, the fearsome impact rode through the weapon and struck Shalltear’s body.

“Gueh!” The impact from being rammed by a giant fist forced an embarrassing noise from Shalltear and sent her flying. The damage from the shockwave was insignificant, and the physical attack itself was blocked by the Spuit Lance. However, the knock back effect of the shockwave penetrated the magic defenses of Shalltear’s equipment.

Although her stumbling balance was quickly restored with the help of a magic item, her head was dyed red with anger. “Y, You, how dare you make me utter such a disgraceful sound! Before I tear you to pieces I’ll pry the same… same?” As she turned around, Shalltear’s vision was met with a huge light and she felt her temper instantly vanish.

In Ainz' hand was a bow covered in the light of the sun. The arrowhead that was giving off a brilliant resplendence, needless to say, was pointing directly at Shalltear. "N, No way. No, it's a lie… That's, Hou Yi?" A story passed down in a distant land called China[3], a weapon named after the hero who was said to have shot down the sun. It was the main weapon of Shalltear's creator.

Almost all of the Guardians had established measures against ranged attacks, so an arrow was nothing to fear. However, that arrow did not deal physical damage; instead, it was a mass of elemental damage. In other words, it was regarded as magic and unblockable. *Damn it! I don't have any mana! I could block it if it's magic! Even a skill would be fine! I should've saved a bit if I'd known… No, that's not right!*

The fact that she had no mana, nor any skill uses left, everything was a result of the earlier battle. In other words, everything was a result of the scheme of the man known as Ainz Ooal Gown. With her eyes dyed red, Shalltear let out an angry cry. It was the appearance of one who understood what was to come next, the struggle of one who did not want to admit defeat.

"You bastard! Peroroncino-sama's weapon! Everything was part of your plan! How did you prepare that weapon?! Where were you hiding it! Was it a skill triggered by breaking the wooden rod?!" Just what sort of trick was it? It was as if his actions were favored by the world itself.

"A magician does not reveal his tricks."

"How is that a magic trick! How did you pull out Peroroncino-sama's weapon with something like that!"

"…Indeed, you are right. This may have been rude to him. Well, the answer is that it was a cash item. Rather, did you finally come to understand? That everything was within my plan?"

The sphere of light, with its charging complete, flew towards Shalltear. Despite knowing that it was useless, she held her lance diagonally to block and, the explosion of light covered the surroundings. While her whole body was burning within the sacred light, Shalltear judged that it was dangerous to retreat back. If things continued like this, she would be overwhelmed without being able to do anything.

Even if the white armor was powerful, it would not be unaffected by the Spuit Lance. Then she had to forgo defence and attack while relying on its life absorption effect. "Ooohhhh!" Ill-fitting with her outward appearance, a vigorous battle cry exploded from Shalltear's throat. A chilling voice floated back in response. "A 7 to 3 chance of victory… around there I believe. There is no need to say which side was the seven, I hope?"

Ainz slowly raised a monstrous, huge axe. Emitting a purple light, the pressure alone from the axe forged from red crystal was enough to make closing the distance difficult. Despite this, Shalltear charged. The only thing she could do now was move forward. "Good resolve. This is the final phase, Shalltear!"

♦ ♦ ♦

[3] A legend from the time of Emperor Yo. The sudden appearance of ten suns in the sky burned the land and crops. It is said that a man named Hou Yi shot down nine.

"…It is Ainz–sama's victory." As if locked in admiration, Cocytus muttered while nodding his head. Whereas Demiurge, who had no aptitude as a warrior, threw a doubtful glance. Of course, Demiurge too, believed that his master will emerge victorious. But his need to analyze the situation logically caused him to question. "Why is that? To me, it looks like it will still be awhile before the victor is decided."

"Shalltear has decided to forgo defence and focus on offense. It is not a bad decision. I too would have done the same in that situation."

"That's right. Ainz-sama has been swapping out his weapons in succession, you can't tell what others weapons he has. In such a situation where there isn't enough information, leaving a wide distance could turn out to be a painful mistake. Wouldn't seeing the bow make her even surer of that? So Shalltear has no choice but to fight at a range where her Spuit Lance can reach. And she can't even use her magic or skills, which would spur her on even more towards that decision… Maybe that's how she judged the situation?"

"Aha, so that's it. The Supreme Beings never did ostentatiously flaunt their weapons in front of us. So you're probably the only one who completely understands their weapons, Cocytus." Cocytus shrugged his shoulders. "I too am only knowledgeable about their names and effects. I have never seen them in person."

"Hmm. I've understood most of it. In other words, now that Shalltear has abandoned her defence, Ainz-sama will pull out the axe and—"

"'Suck The Blood And Eat The Flesh'."

"Thank you, Cocytus. It appears that 'Suck the Blood and Eat the Flesh' has poor balance and thus decreased accuracy. However, it should not be a problem against Shalltear who has decided to forgo defence."

"To think that the entire flow of this battle had been dictated by Ainz–sama… Although I have said this before I can only give my admiration."

"If it's him, then it's even possible for him to read everything from the view of a god. Wouldn't you agree that his insight is fitting for the one who led the Supreme Beings? …Honestly, he probably would have ruled Nazarick just fine even if we didn't exist. It's a little frustrating."

"…I give my admiration to his aptitude for strategy as a magic caster… No, as one who battles."

"However… Is it not true that the victor still has yet to be decided? A battle of health will not be in Ainz–sama's favor."

At those words, Albedo smiled. It was a smile that was sure of his victory. "It'll be alright."

"Why is that?"

"He is the one who wears the name of Ainz Ooal Gown, the one who rules over us all, the one who is both high and supreme. Such a being has declared his victory with his name."

♦♦♦

Each time the two exchanged blows, their health was chipped away. Although Shalltear healed herself with her attacks, Ainz' attacks dished out enough damage to ignore healing of that level. At the same time, his health was also being chipped away by the Spuit Lance. The battle was turning out to closely resemble such a chicken race. The armor threatened to break with every attack from the axe. The feeling of bones breaking and flesh being crushed. It was met by a lance thrust, the lance that was imbued with the striking property from a skill. It transmitted the sensation of shattering through bone.

This feeling… Based on the remaining health, I might win…? Shalltear was glad that she still had a path to victory. If they continued this exchange of blows, she would very narrowly be able to win. A close combat abandoning defence and focusing entirely on offense, where the only thing she could think about was which side would fall first. Ever since such a grisly exchange began, Shalltear had been anxious. A faint glimmer of hope now showed on her face.

That was because, in a corner of her mind, she was calmly calculating their health losses. Her delight was as great as her previous anxiety. "Ahahahaha!" Even while trading blows, laughter trailed out. "Ahahaha! Ainz-sama! It seems you're going to be the first to run out of health?! The difference in our base health is proving to be crucial here!"

A single phrase threw cold water over her thoughts. "…Do you really believe that?" The machinator who gave her a harrowing fight all the way up to this point, the voice of the one who had been controlling everything within the palm of his hand, she realized her own foolishness. Impossible. Then how was he going to turn the tables on this battle? Shalltear could not understand. The answer came in the form of a voice from a third party.

"Time's up, Momonga onii-chan!" A female voice. One she had never heard before, the purposefully childish female voice reminded Shalltear of a certain woman from her memories. That person may sound like that if she disguised her voice, she thought. "Shalltear, what time do you think is it talking about?"

Unaware of the meaning behind the question, as they continued their melee of stabbing each other's bodies with their weapons, Shalltear floated an honest, questioning look to her graceful face.

"If everything until now has been proceeding according to my plan, then this time we have spent also falls within the realm of my predictions. Then the time that has elapsed as told by this watch, what meaning do you think it holds for you and me?"

The axe in Ainz' hand disappeared and was replaced by a shield of pure white. The shield that matched so well with his armor gave him the appearance of a pure white paladin. The shield made a solid noise as it repelled the attack from the Spuit Lance. Why was he now switching to defence?

Although it was probably due to the female voice from just before, Shalltear could not understand the reason for it. Ainz, who had completely switched to defending, the echo of metal carried with it his chilling voice. "There is no need to even answer. It is to bring this to an end. The time has come to finish this battle."

Why? Shalltear still had 25% of her health remaining. Then just how was he going to end the battle? Although Shalltear wanted to scream those words, they would not come out. "…A single attack of super magic cannot bring you down from 100%. Then would not the answer be to bring your health down to where it is appropriate? It seems your health has dropped considerably from our melee."

"…Ah, Ah, Ahhhhhh!!" With her composure gone, Shalltear showered him with attacks; As if her imminent defeat could somehow be prevented by stopping him from talking. Solid noises rang out endlessly from her barrage. It was like a torrential downpour. However, Ainz splendidly blocked all of her attacks. With the composure and confidence to not let even a single drop touch him, even if it had been a waterfall, he continued to speak.

"…In actual fighting strength, I fall short… But equally so, I am higher in magic resistance. Then, do you understand what I am trying to say? Here I come, Shalltear. You can only pray that my calculations were wrong."

"Kuuuuuuu!!" Sensing her approaching defeat, Shalltear renewed her assault. Seeing her face that was greatly twisted, yet still not unsightly, Ainz started his final gamble.

Although he had boasted with confidence to Shalltear, in truth, not everything was still certain. Super magic shared similarities with skills and did not consume mana. However, it was still considered to be magic and thus could not be used while he was a warrior. If he released his warrior transformation magic, he will no longer be able to wear his shield and armor and they will fall off of his body.

There was no chance that he could block Shalltear's attack in that moment. If she were to use all of her skills in that attack, there was a possibility that the super magic would not be enough to end the battle. That would mean his defeat. However, there was no other way to win. Ainz estimated the timing. He would first have to release his magic, then use the cash item he held in his hand. Ainz laughed lightly.

Even in Yggdrasil PVP, he had never used so many cash items. A game and reality, this was the difference between recreation and a fight he had to win at all costs. *Now!* He blocked Shalltear's powerful attack with the shield of his friend and gathered strength to his eyes. He released the warrior transformation, and launched the super magic. Like before, a magic circle appeared in the surroundings. As he was about to destroy the cash item in the shape of an hourglass in his hand—

For an instant, he hesitated. It was born from the feeling of guilt of killing the NPC who carried the thoughts of his comrade. A fatal mistake. Shalltear did not miss that opening. Having discovered the item in his hand, she channeled her skill into the Spuit Lance with the intent to destroy his arm. Ainz, who released his warrior transformation, had no way to avoid that attack—

Shudder. As the Spuit Lance was about to break the item, she felt the presence of an enemy crawl up her spine. Not knowing how it appeared, Shalltear sensed a presence right by her side. It was filled with such hostility that she could not simply overlook it. This was something she absolutely could not ignore. Shalltear quickly took her eyes off of the item and turned to look at the one responsible.

And, saw that there was nothing. The desert 200 meters in diameter created by Ainz' magic. Within it, there was no one save for Ainz and Shalltear. The hostility that she sensed before was already gone without a trace. As if it was a daydream—

"Ah…!" Although Shalltear, having regained her senses, shouted, it was already too late. The broken hourglass reduced the casting time to zero. "「Fallen Down」." At the same time as his voice, everything was wrapped by the light that formed from the narrow space between them.

Within the white heat, Shalltear felt her body crumble away. Her right hand carbonized and broke apart. In that white world, the Spuit Lance slowly fell to what should have been the ground. Her face dried up from the raging heat and her eyes could now only see white.

Her throat too, dried up and, no, whether or not her throat had yet to finish burning, it was difficult to speak. However, these words alone, she had to say no matter what. Gathering all of what was left of her life, of the existence known as Shalltear Bloodfallen, she spoke.

"…Ahhhh, long live Ainz Ooal Gown–sama. You are supreme, truly the strongest existence in all of Nazarick." Towards the strongest leader of the 41 Supreme Beings, she expressed her heartfelt respect. As if the wave of heat had burned away her fetters, while her body could no longer move, her heart felt very light.

At the same time, within her fading consciousness, she recalled the appearance of a figure that should not have been there. It was the one who had cut a path of light through the darkness in order to achieve this outcome.

Normally, undead are immune to all mental effects. However, there was a method that held the same power, despite not being considered as a mental effect. That person used such a method. Shalltear simply smiled as she said: "…Brat." And with a satisfied expression, Shalltear completely vanished into the white world.

♦♦♦

While releasing the skill 'Sky Eye' that she had been maintaining until now, the pretty, pink lips that were pouting returned to its original position. Aura wore an unhappy look as she piled on abuses to the person who was not there.

"Stupid. An undead shouldn't be getting mind controlled. Really, so dumb."

"W-what's wrong, onee-chan?"

"Hm? Nothing." Mare looked over to where Aura was staring, but the only thing he could see within this forest was trees. However, he could make a guess from the direction she was staring at.

She was likely observing the battle between their master and Shalltear. His sister's skill from the Ranger class allowed her to observe everything within two kilometers around her. That was why she, along with the Eyeball Corpse, was given the task of keeping watch.

"S-So, is the battle over?"

"Yeah. Ainz–sama's complete victory."

“O-Of course.” Not even Nazarick’s strongest Guardian could defeat him. Mare imagined the figure of Ainz and thought it was obvious. There was no way that the one who led the Supreme Beings could be defeated.

“Then onee-chan, uh, um, when are we going to collect the items Shalltear was wearing?” Aura recalled the scene right before she released her skill. “I think Ainz–sama has already taken care of it. Let’s pull out like we’ve been ordered to.”

“O, Okay.”

Knowing that his sister was in a somewhat bad mood, Mare agreed without a word. The one who could have been called Aura’s ‘best friend’ became mind controlled. She then pointed her blade against their master, the object of their esteem and loyalty. Although it was obvious that she had to die, it couldn’t be helped that Aura would be a bit grumpy.

Part 4

Within the throne room, Ainz reopened the list and, as expected, found only empty space where Shalltear’s name used to be. With this, Shalltear’s death was confirmed and the 1st phase of the plan was concluded. Pain filled his heart.

Although there was no other way, confirming it like this had made him fully realize what he had done and he was overcome with a sense of guilt. Ainz apologized to Shalltear in his heart. Swallowing his non-existent saliva, he gazed at the Floor Guardians that had gathered there.

“Then I will now carry out Shalltear’s resurrection. Albedo will watch Shalltear’s name. If, like last time, she is still under the effects of mind control…”

“Ainz-sama, though it may be impertinent, at that time, we will deal with her.” At Demiurge’s words, Cocytus and Aura both expressed their agreement and even Mare passively showed his affirmation. Only Albedo was quietly watching the situation. “Demiurge…”

As Ainz muttered, Demiurge, unlike his usual self, nailed in his point with a voice that carried a strong emotion. “Ainz-sama, as a Supreme Being, your words are most noble and we are well aware that we must devote our all to following your will. However, allowing any further harm to come near you will be our greatest shame as your servants.”

Demiurge’s eyes moved slightly from Ainz to Albedo. “If Shalltear rebels once more, we Guardians will destroy her. Please leave this to us.” Understanding their good will, Ainz had no intention of continuing to be stubborn. “I understand. Guardians, if such a time comes, I will leave it to you.” They bowed their heads in unison.

In that moment, Ainz felt ashamed. A pathetic master. In the end, he had left open the possibility of his ‘children’ fighting each other. From the beginning, the cause was his incompetence. He was to blame for everything. As Ainz was about to heave a sigh, he saw Albedo’s tender expression as she stood quietly and stopped himself.

"Ainz-sama, it is fine if you simply remain here. If all of the Supreme Beings were to disappear, then we would no longer have anyone to pledge our loyalty to. And even if we know that we were not abandoned, it would still become lonely if everyone were to leave."

"…Indeed. If no one is here then it would get lonely."

Ainz unwittingly moved his eyes to the insignias of the 40 flags hanging across the Throne Hall. "…Yes, you are right… Back in the Treasure Hall… That was foolish." Ainz let out a whisper that affirmed his conviction and gazed at the Guardians. "Guardians, protect me. Prepare yourselves!"

As they strongly responded in force, Ainz grasped the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown that floated just beside him and pointed it at a corner of the throne room. There, laid a mountain of 500 million gold pieces, more than enough to revive Shalltear. Normally, it would require a keyboard to be operated. There was no need for such a thing now. The mountain of gold began to lose its shape and slowly changed from a solid to a liquid state.

As the Floor Guardians watched with nervous eyes, the melted gold flowed and gathered into a single pool. The gold that weighed ten thousand tons became compressed and changed into the small form of a person. It eventually took on the appearance of a golden doll and the light gradually receded. Soon enough, the light disappeared completely, leaving behind a skin of white wax and long silver hair. In that place was, without a doubt, the figure of Shalltear Bloodfallen.

"Albedo!" Without taking his eyes off of Shalltear, Ainz loudly shouted Albedo's name. "There is no need to worry. It appears the mind control has been dispelled."

"Is that so…" Ainz' heart was swept by a powerful sense of relief. He could feel his mind regaining its calm. He put his hand into his item box and pulled out a black mantle, all the while approaching Shalltear's body. Her eyes were closed and her chest was unmoving. Although the body that was loosely lying on the floor had the appearance of a corpse, the undead were living corpses, there was nothing wrong with this fact. *The strange part is—*

The part that was confirmed just now was a chest that was so flat that it seemed to belong to a boy rather than a girl. In that moment, his eyes lost the place where they were headed and struggled to avert their gaze. Having just been revived, Shalltear was not wearing any clothes and he didn't know where to look.

In his panic, the thought that he could just look elsewhere didn't even enter his mind. Since his eyesight was greatly improved from when he was a human, Ainz could see everything in clear detail. Because she was lying down outstretched, the slight space between her legs—

Ainz hurriedly threw the black mantle in his hand. The mantle unraveled in the air and accurately landed on Shalltear, covering her body. *I didn't think it was a pity! I'm an undead so I don't have a sex drive! Well, almost none. I was just tiny bit curious since her clothes didn't appear with her. Well, you know, you can't take off all their clothes in Yggdrasil. Like I'm saying, right, it's not like I was curious if she had hair down there!*

Not knowing who he was making excuses to, his thoughts were in turmoil as Ainz walked towards Shalltear. His head grew hot, which may or may not have been the reason his footsteps

had slightly slowed. He also ignored the female voice behind him saying: “If it interests you then you need only to say the word. I am always ready.”

As Ainz stood in front of her, sensing his presence, Shalltear opened her crimson eyes. Like someone who overslept, her gaze circled around and stopped on Ainz. “Ainz-sama?” A dazed voice, still only half awake. But within it, one could sense the clear presence of loyalty. Although it was already confirmed by both Albedo and the entire administration system within Nazarick, Ainz felt it with his body. With joy, he fell to his knees and carried Shalltear, who was lying on the floor, in an embrace.

“Ueehhhhh?” It was a slender body that did not match with her immense physical strength. While wearing a stunned expression that showed she had no idea what was happening, Shalltear let out a strange noise. Paying no mind, Ainz hugged her even more tightly. “Thank goodness… No, forgive me. Everything was due to my mistake.”

“Yes? That’s not true, I don’t know what’s going on, but how could Ainz-sama ever make a mistake?!” Shalltear’s cold arms wrapped around his back and drew him close. Although the way her hands were groping around was slightly gross, Ainz left it to the fact that she was probably confirming her sense of touch after being dead until just recently. “Ahh, my first time right here…” He heard something along those lines, but ignored it. However, with a monotonous voice, Albedo raised an objection. “…Ainz-sama. Shalltear is probably tired, so perhaps you should stop.”

“You may be right.”

Like Player revival, NPC revival may be similar and come with a penalty. After all, this was their first attempt at resurrection since coming to this world. “Let us save the full story for later. Before that, I would like for you to tell me a couple of things.” As Ainz released his arms, Shalltear wore a face of regret before shooting Albedo a piercing glare. In response, Albedo flaunted her usual kind expression. Although it seemed like the two were about to continue glaring each other down like usual, Shalltear moved her gaze and brought it to an end.

“Yes, anything. …But Ainz-sama, why am I in the throne hall? And this appearance, your reaction, have I done something to cause you trouble?”

“That is what I wanted to ask you, do you remember what happened?”

“N-No.”

“…I am sorry, Shalltear. I would like you to tell me the last thing you remember.” Shalltear’s memories lasted up until the incident five days prior. Her memories of between then and now had vanished.

Like what he did in Carne village, Ainz was able to erase or fabricate memories with the 10th tier magic ‘Control Amnesia’. However, fabricating memories that spanned even a short length of time cost a large amount of mana. Erasing five days’ worth of memories, even for Ainz who boasted a mana pool and recovery rate that surpassed the limits of ordinary magic casters, was impossible.

Of course, there was always the possibility that reviving an NPC came with the cost of a few days’ worth of memories. And although he didn’t know whether such a thing could be done, there was

also a chance that her amnesia was the result of several people cooperating together. There was too much information that he lacked. At this stage, it was most likely impossible to solve the puzzle.

What was certain was that the identity of the one who used a World class item on Shalltear had sunk back beneath the surface. *An unknown identity is quite bothersome. There is a high possibility that the enemy will aim for an opportunity to bite Nazarick from below the water. …No, perhaps I should be thankful that they're stopping with just that. Well… I will have to thoroughly exact my revenge on whoever is responsible for this.*

Ainz forcefully swallowed the fury that even his undead trait could not suppress and gently spoke to Shalltear. "Is there anything else that you feel is off?" If this was Yggdrasil, there would not be any problems. NPCs did not suffer from the level down penalty. However, there was no way of knowing that this world would be the same. There was a chance that her level fell like a Player Character's would. At that question, Shalltear patted around her body and answered.

"I don't think there are any problems."

"I see." As soon as he answered, Ainz was gripped with apprehension as Shalltear's face showed a shocked expression. "Ainz-sama!"

"What is it! What's wrong?!"

"My chest is gone." If one had to summarize the look on the faces of the Guardians from her words, it would be 'give me my concern back.' With his lips turned upside down, even Demiurge wore an incredulous expression.

"You, do you even know what you're saying given what the situation was like until now?!" Hearing Albedo yell as everyone's representative, Shalltear's shoulders flinched. Ainz felt the strength leave his body, enough for him to feel as if he was going to keel over. As he stared at the Guardians who were starting to bicker with Shalltear, various thoughts regarding resurrection ran through his mind.

In particular, he thought that it would be good if the people at the graveyard, Clementine and Khajit, would lose their memories as well if they were to be revived. But that was being too optimistic. The reason was that he didn't know as to why Shalltear's memories had vanished. Being brought back from the dead, there was no guarantee that using revival magic was the same as spending gold to revive an NPC.

While Ainz was in the midst of such thoughts, Shalltear was one-sidedly being admonished by Albedo and even had traces of tears in her eyes. Seeing this, Ainz knew that his eyes were filled with a sense of longing. The scene of the sister Bukubuku Chagama picking on her younger sibling, Peroroncino. His comrades laughing as they watched over them. The same scene that was now overlapping with the NPCs.

As Ainz was about to lightly raise his hand, it halted in mid-air. As if a thin glass wall blocked his way. What Ainz felt was loneliness. The warm place where the Guardians existed, it was like a projection on a screen, different, a place far off. If Ainz were to join them, they will assume a

stance of servitude. But that was merely out of intimidation, different from the warmth of his past comrades. He felt it was regrettable.

As he let his hand fall weakly to his side, as if she sensed something, Albedo turned and quietly stared at Ainz. It was impossible to discern the emotions hidden within him through his eyes. Just as he was about to ask her why she was staring at him despite this, his eyes went wide at the tender light that glinted from her pupils. She was gently holding out her hand to him. After a brief hesitation, Ainz grabbed it and joined the rest of the Guardians.

Albedo was the first one to open her mouth, soon followed by the others. "Ainz-sama as well, please give Shalltear a firm scolding."

"I agree! Please say something harsh to this idiot!"

"Indeed. I believe it will be prudent to give a strong word of warning."

"It's Ainz-sama's precious words so make sure you listen closely."

"B-But not too mean… Uh, umm, I mean…"

"Ha, Hahaha." Despite the surprised eyes of the Guardians that fell on him, Ainz could not stop the laughter that burst from his lips, no, his heart. Having laughed aplenty, Ainz quietly turned his eyes to Shalltear.

"Although I have said this to Albedo before, Shalltear is not to fault for this incident. All of the blame lies with me. My predictions could not reach this far despite all of the information that I managed to obtain. Shalltear, you are blameless. Remember these words."

"Th-Thank you."

"I will leave the matter of finding out what happened to Shalltear to Demiurge. How about it?"

Demiurge bowed his head to express his reverence towards the command. Then, as if suddenly remembering, asked. "Ainz-sama. About Sebas—"

"He is bait." The Guardians all nodded their heads in subordination as Ainz calmly proclaimed that he would use one of their own as bait. It was obvious to them that the will of the master of the Great Tomb of Nazarick took precedence over the safety of their comrade.

"I do not wish it, but there is no other choice. …Although I do not know why Shalltear was targeted, if the enemy were to make another move, there is a high chance that their next target will be the one who accompanied her. That is why I did not call him back to give him a World class item. …Albedo, select someone who will secretly observe Sebas' surroundings. …Even if Sebas is to be bait, I have no intention of handing him over so readily. Tell the observer to engage the enemy if they approach him."

Having given his order, Ainz narrowed his eyes. The intensity of the red flames dimmed slightly. *…I don't know who used a World class item on Shalltear, but eventually, somewhere, we will clash. At that time, I will be sure to repay this debt in full!*

"I hear and obey. I will take their strength into consideration and send a dispatch as soon as possible."

"I leave it to you. Although I have learned that resurrection is possible thanks to Shalltear, I do not wish to ever repeat having to kill what my comrades have created." Deeply moved, they bowed their heads. Even if the Guardians already knew that Ainz cherished them so, hearing it directly from his own mouth made it all the more effective. As if she had just vaguely figured out what had happened to her, Shalltear's face was appalled. Her expression struggled to hide her shame. Ainz gestured at her to perish the thought.

At that moment, someone beside him spoke. "Uh, umm, Ainz-sama."

"What is it, Mare?"

"Um, uh, well, the traces of that battle, should I cover it?"

"No need. Did you know? If you destroy a magic sealing crystal, a powerful blast will come forth and destroy the entire area."

"Re-Really?"

"…Forgive me, I lied. It is like this. Sometimes, even a lie can turn into the truth. Magic sealing crystals are supposed to be valuable, so they will not be able to test it. Albedo, create a crack in Nigan's crystal. Tell the head blacksmith to do the same on the armor I commissioned. It should seem like it went through a battle."

"I will carry out your order."

"Also, it appears I have been too naive. There is no doubt that there is an enemy near us who seeks to harm Nazarick. We must move onto the plan for strengthening Nazarick as soon as possible. For that reason, I will use my skill to create an undead army. I have said all this before… ah, was it only Albedo who was present then? Regardless, this will be our utmost priority. I wish to establish a plan to collect the corpses from the E-Rantel graveyard."

"There is something I wish to say to you regarding that matter, Ainz-sama."

"What is it, Albedo?"

"When Ainz-sama creates undead with his skill, it is to my knowledge that using human bodies as the catalyst will, at best, result in the weaker type of undead minions, even if they are of the intermediate tier."

"Right. And what of it?" The undead made from the bodies of the Sunlight Scripture were, at best, level 40. When he tried to raise them past that level, after a certain time, they vanished along with the corpses.

"Yes. In truth, I have devised a way for you to obtain new bodies. Will you not consider using corpses other than humans?"

"…I will assume that you are not talking about the corpses of Nazarick's servants."

“No, of course not. It is a different race.” Albedo smiled. A smile that was both cruel, and beautiful. “Aura discovered a village of Lizardmen. Will you not invade their land and purge them?”

Epilogue

The leader of the mithril ranked adventurer group Sky Wolf, Berette, opened the front entrance to the adventurer's guild. Adventurers were looking at him with respect and worship. Berette was already quite used to this scene, but the intensity of the gazes did not seem to be as strong as compared to a month ago.

Guess it can't be helped. He set his eyes on the bulletin board's commission contents, but unfortunately he was unable to find any mithril ranked missions at all. Missions only entrusted to mithril ranked adventurers did not appear very often. However the reason for the shortage of missions this time was because an adventurer who could quickly solve all missions ranked mithril and above had appeared.

"…Momon-san." Half complaining, Berette muttered this name. About a month ago, this man exterminated a vampire that was both highly capable and unbelievably powerful. It was a fierce battle that had shaken the heavens and earth. He didn't witness the battle himself, but after the seeing the remnants of the battle, one could imagine just what kind of battle it was. Igavaruji's adventurer group, Kuragura, had accompanied him but were completely annihilated from the collateral damage they suffered during the fight. This result was not surprising.

No, if anyone were to join that battle, it would be certain death. The explosion of the magic sealing crystal had charred the surrounding ground black, some areas had even turned into a desert. The shocking thing was, if it hadn't been done that way, the vampire would've been impossible to defeat. Furthermore—

"They survived…" On the other hand, they, who had been victorious and returned safely, would naturally be regarded as more of a monster than the vampire against whom Berette never stood a chance. That was why his tone just now had been humble, and furthermore, Momon was strong enough to command the respect of others.

Just as he was fantasizing about this absolutely powerful being, he heard the door opening and a commotion broke out, as if a burst of wind had entered the guild. Roughly guessing what the commotion was about, Berette also turned his gaze toward the direction everyone else was looking at. Sure enough, he saw the person he expected.

The main topic of this town was the 'Dark Hero', Momon. With two great swords on his back and accompanied by a woman of peerless beauty. "The front part of that armor was made using a large amount of adamantite… Just how much money is it worth?"

The title of "Dark Hero" came from that set of ultra-high-class full-body armor, which had been severely damaged upon his return. It had been charred all over, with ruptures and claw marks, but now that set of dark armor was unblemished and shone brilliantly under the sunlight.

This was the due to the efforts of the Magicians' Guild, who mobilized all their magic casters to cast repair magic on it. The metallic plate hung in front of his chest was — the living legend, adventurers' object of worship, humanity's trump card that protected them from other powerful races — adamantite.

His achievements already far surpassed orichalcum rank, which was already a high enough rank that had never once appeared in the city of E-Rantel. Like the appearance of a hero that came right out of a storybook, the atmosphere inside the guildhall suddenly became rowdy.

"The Kingdom's third adamantite adventurer…"

"That's him… 'Dark Hero' Momon… And the one behind him is 'Beautiful Princess' Nabel, she really is as beautiful as the rumors say."

“You know in that forest, the huge chunk of it that has been burnt to cinders is said to be his work… I’ve heard he used martial arts to burn everything down.”

“No way, how is that possible… If an area of that size was destroyed using martial arts, can you really say he’s still human?”

“He’s probably one of the few who could do such a thing? The adamantite rank is the pinnacle for adventurers. If one were to say that he’s the best within the adamantite rank, I wouldn’t be surprised at all.”

Under everyone’s worshipping gazes, Momon leisurely walked towards the counter. The adventurers who were discussing mission details with the female receptionist all parted to give way to this highest-ranking adventurer. Their expressions showed respect, and fear.

Momon casually spoke with the receptionist. “The task entrusted to us is completed, please help us search to see if there’s any new work.” The girl’s eyes widened, but only for a moment. Berette knew why she had opened her eyes so widely. The job Momon and Nabel had accepted was very difficult even for mithril ranked adventurers.

This mission had been expected to take a while, but they solved it within such a short amount of time. That’s right, if it was entrusted to him, even mithril ranked missions could be completed with a breeze. This was only natural, since the highest ranking adventurers were of this caliber.

“Guess there’s nothing left for me to do.” Berette couldn’t help complaining, but then again he wasn’t serious. After reaching the rank of mithril, unless there were special circumstances, one would have more than enough money to retire and live wealthily for the rest of their life. Adventurers who continued adventuring after reaching this rank mostly did so for reasons other than money.

“Ah, Momon-san. I am very sorry, but at the moment we don’t have any suitable missions for you, my sincere apologies.” The receptionist stood up and bowed deeply. “So it’s like that—” It was as if he intended to say something but stopped halfway.

After a few seconds he spoke again: “I see, that’s wonderful, because I suddenly remembered an urgent matter that demands my attention, so I’ll return to my hotel first. If anything urgent comes up you can find me there. I assume you know which hotel I am staying at, right?”

“Yes, it’s Shining Golden Pavilion right?”

Momon nodded and elegantly turned around, causing his red cloak to billow, and proceeded to walk out. When Momon passed him by, Berette thought he could hear him talking, but the voice was so soft, he couldn’t make out the contents of his intermittent speech. What Berette did not hear, was Ainz commanding his distant subordinates to reveal the full extent of their military might.

“Order Gargantua to start moving, call Victim and wait for Cocytus to return. Since this is a rare opportunity, let all the Floor Guardians move out together.”

Afterword

It had been four months since the last volume, I am really happy to see everyone again! I am the author, Maruyama Kugane. How do you find <Overlord 3 - The Bloody Valkyrie>? It would be my honor if you find it great.

But, what should I write in the afterword? I have this question every time. With my area of activity being home and the office, I have no confidence of making it interesting. That's why, I decided to make my life for the past four months public.

First, I spent about a month drafting my work. I then submitted it to my editors for editing. Using this volume as an example, I completed the story around mid-January. Next, after the draft has been proofread, it returns to me for further adjustments. Including the author's proofreading, it takes a month and a half for the work to be finished, and the volume is done.

With the repeated submission of drafts and edits, the amount of time spent on <Overlord 3 - The Bloody Valkyrie> is… roughly three months. From the time the work is finished until publishing, there is about a month of leisure time. I will divide this month by four, and spend some time updating my web novel.

My work in my company is simple and I can go home early, that's why I can manage to complete my draft. For those who work until very late, they will need to cut down on their sleeping time. They won't even have a leisurely month like this, it must be hard on them.

…But for authors who publish a book every three months, how do they manage? I wish someone could tell me.

Next, I would like to express my gratitude. So-Bin-sama, everyone in Chord Design Studio, Dapo-sama, F-tan-sama. If not for your help, I would not had been able to finish this work, I am thankful for your help. Honey, thank you for your retort, I will edit right away.

And the readers who purchase this book, thank you very much. If you have any comments or suggestions… you can send a postcard to me (I am sorry, but you will need to bear the postage cost). For readers on the internet, you can do so directly on the web site, I will be very grateful.

Next volume… I plan to write about the Lizardmen for the whole volume. I will be very happy if you continue to give me your support. Well then, see you next time.

March 2013, Maruyama Kugane.

Postscript by So-bin

I REALLY LIKE AINZ-SAMA IN THE LAST BIT.
AND ANGRY DEMIURGE WAS REFRESHING TOO (LOL)

2013. So-bin

Character 9

ユリ・アルファ

Heteromorphic Race

Yuri・α

BIG SISTER OF THE BATTLE MAIDS

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Battle Maid	
Residence	One of the servant's room in basement 9	
Alignment	Good	Sense of Justice: 150
Racial Level	Zombie	10 lv
	Dullahan	1 lv
Job Level	Vanguard	10 lv
	Lone combatant	5 lv
	Chef	1 lv
	Others	

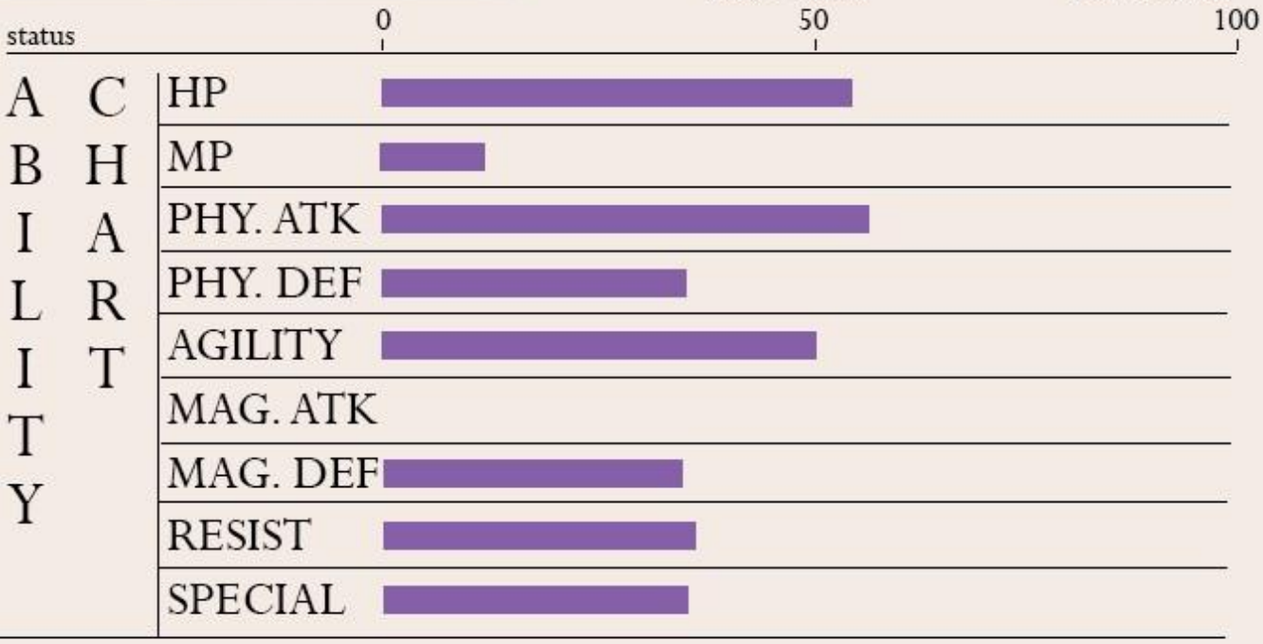
[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 51 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 11 level — Total 40 level

ABILITY CHART

status



Character 10

シーゼット ニイチニハチ・デルタ

Heteromorphic Race

CZ2128・Δ

SNEAK ATTACK MAID

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Battle Maid		
Residence	One of the servant's room in basement 9		
Alignment	Neutral ~Good	Sense of Justice:	100
Racial Level	Automaton		5 lv
Job Level	Gunner		10 lv
	Sniper		3 lv
	Assassin		3 lv
	Hunter		3 lv
	Others		

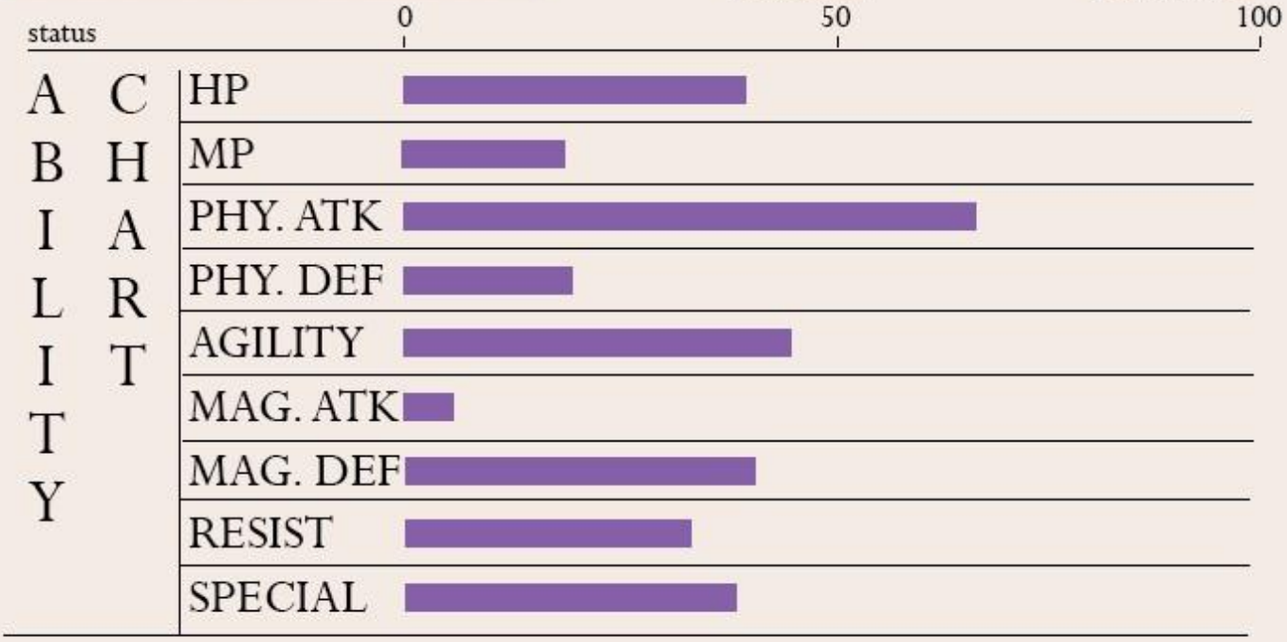
[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 46 level

Racial level Job level

Total 5 level Total 41 level

status

ABILITY CHART



Character 11

シャルティア・ブラッドフォールン

Heteromorphic Race

Shalltear Bloodfallen

THE BLOODY VALKYRIE

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 1st ~ 3rd Floor Guardian	
Residence	2nd Floor Burial Chambers	
Alignment	Great~Extreme Evil	Sense of Justice: -450
Racial Level	Vampire	10 lv
	True Vampire	10 lv
Job Level	Valkyrie / Lance	5 lv
	Cursed Knight	5 lv
	Priest	10 lv
	Others	

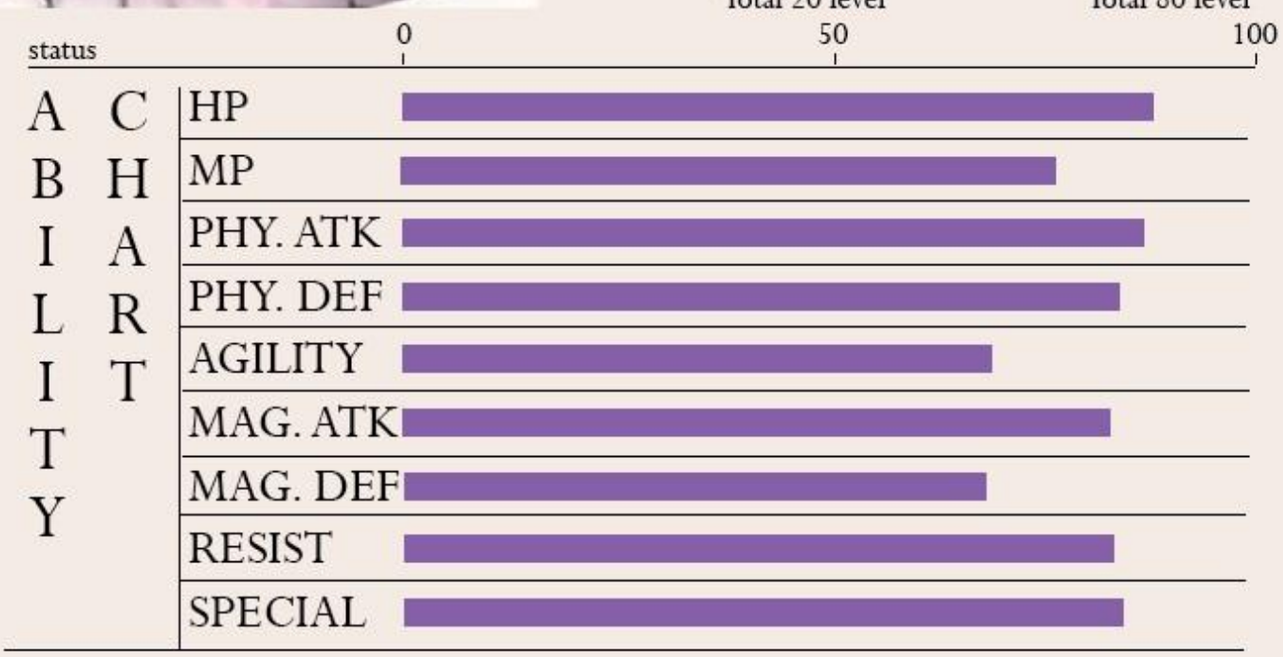
[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 100 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 20 level — Total 80 level

ABILITY CHART

status



Character 12

パンドラズ・アクター

Heteromorphic
Race

Pandora's Actor

EVER CHANGING MAN WITHOUT A FACE

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Treasury Zone Guardian		
Residence	Treasury Zone Manager Office		
Alignment	Neutral	Sense of Justice:	-50
Racial Level	Doppelganger		15 lv
	Greater Doppelganger		10 lv
Job Level	Professional		10 lv
	Artisan		10 lv
	King of the Fort		15 lv
	Others		

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 100 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 45 level — Total 55 level

ABILITY CHART

status

	0	50	100
HP			
MP			
PHY. ATK	(Adaptable)		
PHY. DEF	(Adaptable)		
AGILITY			(Adaptable)
MAG. ATK	(Adaptable)		
MAG. DEF	(Adaptable)		
RESIST	(Adaptable)		
SPECIAL			